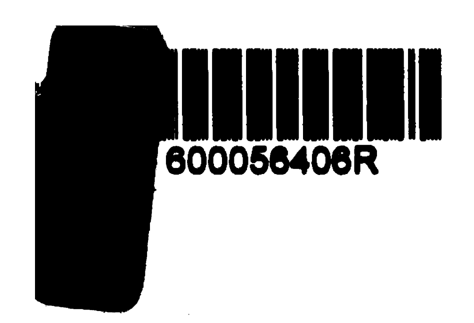
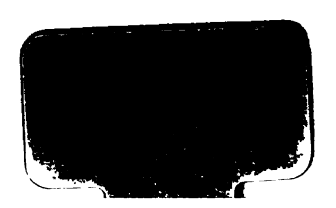



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KITH AND KIN.

A Novel.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,

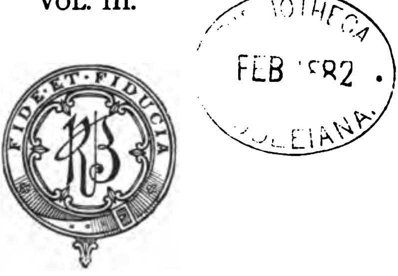
AUTHOR OF

'THE FIRST VIOLIN,' 'PROBATION,' 'MADE OR MARRED,'
'ONE OF THREE,' ETC.

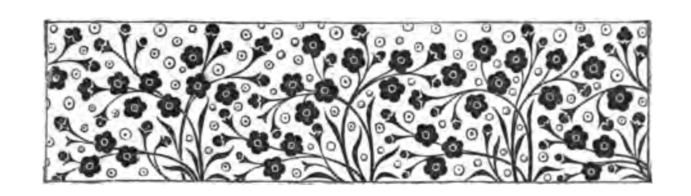
> 'God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
> Boasts two soul-sides; one to face the world with,
> And one to show a woman when he loves her.'
>
> BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

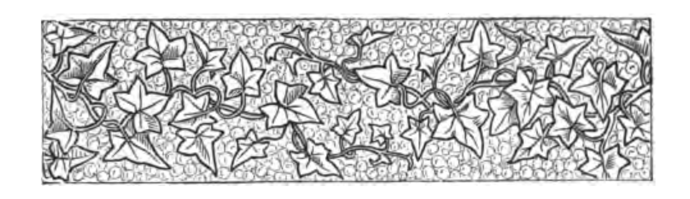
VOL. III.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.



KITH AND KIN.

CHAPTER I.

'A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU.'

BERNARD AGLIONBY'S frame of mind was not a happy one on that evening of the 31st of December; it had been anything but cheerful all day; it waxed drearier and drearier during his ten-mile drive to Danesdale Castle with his aunt, Mrs. Bryce, and Lizzie, his betrothed. He had brought Miss Vane from Irkford, and introduced her into the halls of his ancestors, and the presence of his mother's

sister, last night. The result, he was obliged to own, had hardly been successful. Miss Vane had done little else but shiver since her arrival. She had failed to make a good impression on Mrs. Bryce, whose home was in London, and who had never met her before. She had treated Mrs. Aveson with a vulgar haughtiness, which had galled the feelings of the good woman beyond description. But she had been very amiable to Bernard, and had confided to him that she looked upon this ball as the turning-point in her destiny. Perhaps it was ; it was not for him to gainsay it. His moodiness arose from mental indecision. He had not got to the stage of absolute confession, even to himself, that his engagement was a failure. He would not confess it. Much less had he allowed even the idea distinctly to shape itself in his mind, that he was, to put it mildly, thinking with deep interest of another woman. Yet the savage discontent and irritation which he experienced were due, could he but have known

it, to these two very facts: that his engagement was a failure and he was beginning to find it out, and that his thoughts, whenever he allowed them free course, were engrossed with another woman. He felt all the miserable unrest and irritation which accompanies mental transition periods, whether they be of transition from good to bad, or from bad to good.

Thus they were a silent party as they drove along the dark roads. Lizzie was shrouded in her wraps, and was solicitous about her dress, lest it should be crushed. Mrs. Bryce was not a talkative woman. Bernard had never in his life felt less inclined to speak—less inclined for a festivity of any kind, for sociability in any shape.

At last they turned in at the great stone gateway at the foot of the hill, rolled for half a mile up the broad, smooth drive, and stopped under a large awning filled with servants, light, and bustle.

Poor Lizzie (whom I commiserate sincerely

in this crisis of her fate) felt, as she entered, as if she had crossed the Rubicon. The fears which she had originally felt for herself had in a great measure subsided. With the enduing of her superfine ball-dress, and the consciousness of her triumphant prettiness, all apprehensions for herself had vanished. With such a frock and such a face one's behaviour would naturally adapt itself to that of the very highest circles. All that was needed was to be fine enough ; and on that point she had a proud consciousness she had never been known to fail. She felt a little uneasiness about Bernard. She hoped he would tone down his brusque and abrupt manners. She remembered only too well the terrible solecisms of which he had often been guilty at suburban tea-parties, and his reckless disregard of semi-detached villa conventionalities, and a deep distrust of the probable demeanour of her betrothed took possession of her soul.

Bernard at last found himself with Lizzie on his arm, and Mrs. Bryce by his side, in

the large drawing-room, approaching Miss Danesdale and Sir Gabriel.

Lizzie Vane's only experience of balls had been such as had taken place amongst intimate friends, the Miss Goldings and such as they, and partaken in by the mankind belonging to them. She had a confused idea, as she went up the room on her lover's arm, that this was in some way different from those past balls.

Bernard noticed that she grew very quiet, and even subdued. He could not know that her soul was gradually filling with dismay as she realised that her pink frock (pink was the colour selected by Lizzie for this her *début* in fashionable society), whether 'the correct thing,' as the Irkford milliner had assured her, or not, was certainly unique: and that she found the crowd of well-bred starers oppressive. Bernard performed the introductions necessary. Mrs. Bryce and Miss Danesdale had already exchanged calls. The latter cast one comprehensive glance over

Miss Vane, then, taking the trouble to speak in a voice which could be heard, she expressed her regret that she had not been able to call upon her before the ball, because of her only having arrived so immediately before it; she hoped to have the pleasure later.

'Oh yes!' murmured Miss Vane, to whom Miss Danesdale appeared a very formidable personage.

Then Bernard led up Randulf and introduced him. Randulf asked if he might have the second dance with her, and, consent having been given, put her name down and departed. Bernard's dancing powers were not of the most brilliant description, but he managed to convey his betrothed safely through the mazes of the first quadrille, and then led her back into the drawing-room. By this time the greater number of the expected guests had arrived, and Miss Vane was beginning to shake off her first timidity. Ambition began to assert itself in her bosom. She looked very pretty. Her face wore a

delicate flush, and her blue eyes had grown more deeply blue; at the end of the first dance everyone had seen her, and everyone who did not know her wanted to know who she was. All the women said, 'What a wonderful dress! Do look at that pink frock! Did you ever behold anything like it?' All the men agreed about the frock (possibly for the sake of peace), but no outlandishly pink raiment could blind them to the charms of its wearer's face. Soon Lizzie was enjoying what was a veritable triumph for her. Her programme was full, to the last dance. Bernard's name was down for one other, a square, towards the end of the evening. He had told her not to refuse any dances on his account, 'because I am such a wretched hand at it, you know,' and she had fully acted up to his suggestion. Randulf took her to dance the second dance, a waltz, with him. After a short time Bernard, seeing that Mrs. Bryce had established friendly relations with a distinguished dowager, and was in full flow of

conversation with her, left the drawing-room, and went to the ball-room. There he stopped for a short time, watching the dancers; noting especially the pink dress and the fleet feet of its wearer. Then he found Philippa Danesdale standing near him, also looking on. (To the last day of his life he remembered every incident and detail of that evening, as if they had happened yesterday.)

'You do not dance, Mr. Aglionby?' inquired Philippa.

'Very badly. I should not like to inflict myself as a partner on any of the ladies here.'

'Then will you give me your arm to the drawing-room? I just came to see that Randulf was doing his duty; but I know that my guests have not yet all arrived.'

Bernard gave her his arm, and they returned to the drawing-room. He remained by her side, conversing with her in the intervals of receiving her guests: by-and-by the music in the ballroom ceased. The draw-

ing-room was at this time almost empty, and still he stood, his elbow resting on the mantel-piece, talking to Philippa, when the first couples began to come in from the dancing-room. Randulf Danesdale, with Lizzie, was the first to enter. Miss Vane was flushed; her hair had got a trifle disordered; she looked excited. She was now so far at her ease that she had begun to talk, and Randulf had been malign enough to draw her out a little. Her voice, with its unmistakably underbred and provincial accent was heard, upraised: on this vision Bernard's eye rested, till he suddenly awoke to the consciousness of his duties, and going forward, offered Miss Vane his arm.

'You're dreaming, Aglionby,' observed Randulf, lightly.

'Am I? Very likely.'

'I can sympathise,' added young Danesdale, 'for so am I.'

'Of what, or of whom?' asked Aglionby, his more genial smile flitting across his face.

Randulf bent forward to him, having first ascertained that Miss Vane's attention was otherwise occupied, and said in a low voice:

'I'm dreaming of dancing with Delphine Conisbrough. She makes me wait long enough, does she not? The ball hasn't begun for me till——why, there they are!'

'With Del——' Aglionby had just ejaculated, electrified, for he had had no forewarning that any of the Conisbroughs were to be there. His glance followed Randulf's, and he had the sensation of starting violently. In reality he turned rather slowly and deliberately, and looked. His face changed. He bit his lips, and became a shade paler. Every pulse was beating wildly. He was in no state to ask himself what it meant. He watched, as if it had been some dissolving view, and saw how Miss Danesdale, with her prim little smile, and her neat little steps, and her unimpeachable etiquette, went forward a little, with outstretched hand, and greeted them. And while she spoke to Mrs.

Malleson, Bernard's eyes looked clean over their heads, and met straightly those of Judith Conisbrough. Exactly the same sensation—only far more potent now—as that which had mastered him when he had taken leave of her at her mother's house, seized him—a strong, overwhelming thrill of delight and joy, such as no other being had ever awakened in him. And with it, yet more powerfully than before, he realised that not he alone experienced the sensation. He had the knowledge, intuitive, instinctive, triumphant, that she shared it to the full. He saw how, though she remained calm and composed, her bosom rose and fell with a long, deep inspiration; he saw her eyes change their expression—the shock first, the light that filled them afterwards, and—most eloquent, most intoxicating of all—their final sinking before his long gaze. He lived through a thousand changing phases of emotion while he stood still there, looking at her; he realised with passionate delight, that it was not only he who found her beautiful,

but all others who had eyes to see. None could deny that she was beautiful: her outward form did but express her inner soul. A man behind him murmured to another, and Bernard heard him:

'Jove, what splendid-looking girls! Who are they? Are they from your part of the country too?'

He watched while the two girls shook hands with Miss Danesdale. He saw Randulf go up to them and greet them, and how the first expression of plėasure which had crossed their faces appeared there. Randulf's dream was going to be realised, Bernard reflected, with wild envy. He could arrange things pretty much according to his own pleasure. Delphine had kept him waiting, as he said; so much the oftener would he make her dance with him now that at last she was there.

Then Aglionby became feebly conscious that his arm was somewhat roughly jogged, and that a voice which he seemed to have heard fifty years ago sounded in his ear.

'Bernard, are you dreaming? Here's a lady speaking to you.'

With a veritable start this time he came to his senses, and beheld Mrs. Malleson, in black tulle and *gloire de Dijon* roses, holding out a hand to him, and smiling in friendly wise.

'Mrs. Malleson, I—— you are late, surely, are you not?'

'We are, I believe, and I am afraid it is my fault. I hope the men are not all so deeply engaged that the Miss Conisbroughs will get no dances.'

Here some one came and said to Lizzie that he thought it was their dance. Nothing loth, she suffered herself to be led away.

'That is Miss Vane, I know,' observed Mrs. Malleson. 'You must introduce her later. She is wonderfully pretty.'

She was in her turn monopolised and led away. Aglionby could not have replied had she remained. If he had never known, or never admitted the truth to himself until now, at last it overwhelmed him. Lizzie

Vane beautiful! Lizzie Vane *beloved* by him!

It was like awakening from some ghastly dream, to be confronted by a yet more horrible reality. He mechanically passed his hand over his eyes, and shivered. When he looked round again he saw that Judith was standing alone. Philippa was receiving some very late guests. Delphine had been led away, so had Mrs. Malleson. Several groups were in the room, but both he and Judith were emphatically alone—outside them all. Presently he found himself by her side—as how should he not? There was no one else there, so far as he knew. On a desert island even enemies become reconciled.

'I hope you have not quite forgotten me, Miss Conisbrough.'

His voice was low, and there was no smile on his face, any more than there was on hers. With both of them it was far too deadly earnest to permit of smiles or jests.

'It would imply an unpardonably short

memory on my part, if I had,' she answered, very gravely, and looking more majestic than ever. He felt her gloved hand within his, and for a blessed moment or two he forgot Lizzie Vane's very existence. With the actual touch of her hand, with the sound of her pathetic contralto voice, the spell rushed blindingly over him. How had he lived out these weeks since he parted from her? How had he been able to think it all over, as he had done again and again, calmly and without any particular emotion? In one of Torguéneff's novels he relates the story of a Russian peasant woman, whose only and adored son is suddenly killed. A visitor, calling a week or so later, finds the woman, to his surprise, calm, collected, and even cheerful. 'Laissez la,' observed the husband, 'elle est fossilée!' Now Bernard knew that was exactly what he had been—fossilised; unrealising what had happened to him. For him, as for that peasant woman, the day of awakening had dawned.

He allowed his eyes and his voice to tell Judith that in finding her to-night he had found that which he most desired to see. He allowed his eyes and his voice also to question her eyes and her voice, and in their very hesitation, in their reply, in their very trouble, their abashed quietness, he read the answer he wished for. She had not escaped unscathed from the ordeal which had been too much for him. Twice already to-night he had asked her this question, and heard this answer—merely with look and tone—without any word whatever, and he wanted to ask it again and again, and to have her answer it as often as he asked it. She was standing, so was he. That last long look was hardly over, when he offered her his arm, and said :

'You are not dancing ; come to the sofa and sit down.'

She complied ; mechanically she sat down and he beside her ; he put his arm over the back of the sofa ; she was leaning back, and

the lace ruffle of her dress just touched his wrist, and the contact made his blood run faster.

'Mrs. Conisbrough is not with you?' he inquired.

'No, she is not well. She made a point of Delphine's and my coming.'

Bernard did not ask her for a dance. He felt a sympathetic comprehension of her position. He knew she would have to dance, unless she wished to be remarkable, which he was sure was no part of her scheme. But he knew that it would be against her will—that she would be more grateful to those who did not ask her than to those who did, and he refrained.

'You said,' he went on, in the same low tone, 'that if we met in society, we might meet as friends. I have not troubled you since you told me that, have I?'

Judith paused, and at last said constrainedly:

'No.'

'No. Therefore I claim my reward now.

We are in society to-night. It is the time when we are allowed by your own law to be on friendly terms, and I mean to take advantage of the fact. Will you grant me a favour? Will you let me take you in to supper?'

Judith, in her simplicity and surprise, was quite bewildered, and felt distracted how to act. Evidently he had not given up, and did not intend to give up, any scrap of a friendly or cousinly privilege which might be open to him. If her secret in the background had been less terrible and (to her) tragic, she would have been amused at Aglionby's determination not to be set aside. As it was, she replied at last, gently:

'Don't you think there is another lady whom you ought rather to take in to supper?'

He opened his eyes as if not understanding, then remarked:

'Oh, you mean Miss Vane. Do not imagine that I am neglecting her. Her partner at the supper-table is already selected.

She told me so herself. She is to dance an "extra," I think she called it, before supper, or after, I forget which—but with some man who is to take her in to that repast. Therefore, may I hope for the pleasure? To "confound the politics" of the assembled multitude, if for no other reason,' he added. 'They are sure to look for signs of enmity between us, and I should like to disconcert them.'

'Very well, if you wish it,' said Judith, gravely. 'And if I must go in to supper, as I suppose I must.'

'I'm afraid you have not looked forward with any enjoyment to this ball?'

'*Enjoyment!*' echoed Judith, drearily; and added, half forgetting the terms she had herself laid down, 'Do not think it very strange that Delphine and I should be here. Mamma insisted, and we dared not thwart her. You do not know how unwilling we were, and how it has troubled us.'

'I know what it must feel like to you,' he

said ; and was going to say more. He was going to say that though he knew what it had cost her, yet that he was not altogether sorry, since it had brought them together, and she would not allow any other kind of intercourse. But just at that moment Sir Gabriel, whom Judith had not yet spoken to, arrived upon the scene. Sir Gabriel had received an inkling of the truth from his son, who had had it from Mrs. Malleson. Randulf had hastily confided it to Sir Gabriel :

'I wish you'd pay a little attention to the Miss Conisbroughs, sir. They didn't want to come a bit—to meet Aglionby, you know, and not three months since their uncle's death ; but their mother made them, and they dared not cross her—so if you wouldn't mind——'

The hint was more than enough for the warm-hearted old gentleman. Despite his real liking for Aglionby, he had never ceased to shake his head over the will, and to think that Mrs. Conisbrough and those girls had

been very badly used. He had just had Delphine introduced to him in the ballroom, and now he made his way to Judith.

'Miss Conisbrough, I'm delighted to see you here. I have just been talking to your sister, who is the loveliest creature I've seen for twenty years and more. I may say that to you, you know. If she doesn't turn some heads to-night, why, they are not the same kind of heads that used to be on men's shoulders in my days.'

Judith's face flushed. She smiled a pleased yet nervous smile. Yes, Delphine was all that the good old man called her, and how delightful this sweet incense of justice, not flattery, would have been—how grateful, if—if only! She crushed down a desire to laugh, or cry, she knew not which—an hysteric feeling, and answered Sir Gabriel politely, but, as he thought, a little indifferently. But, remembering his son's words, he stood talking to her for some time, and finally offered her his arm to take her to the ballroom and

dance a quadrille with her. Aglionby went with them at the same time. So long as he did not exceed the bounds of politeness, he told himself—so long as his outward conduct could be denominated 'friendly'—he shook his head back—he *would* not turn himself into a conventional machine to say, 'How do you do?' 'Good-evening,' and no more.

As they entered the ballroom, they were confronted by Miss Vane, more flushed now, more at her ease, and arm-in-arm with a youth who had been introduced to her as Lord Charles Startforth, and who would by his title alone have fulfilled, to her mind, every requisite necessary to the constitution of a 'real swell!' She saw Bernard, Sir Gabriel, and Judith enter, and at once inquired of her partner:

'Eh, I say, isn't that Sir Gabriel?'

'That is Sir Gabriel,' replied the young gentleman, with *sang froid.* He had found Miss Vane and her provincialisms a source of the most exquisite entertainment.

'I thought so. And there's my beloved with him.'

'Your beloved—happy man! Aglionby, I suppose you mean?'

'Yes,' said Miss Vane, explaining. 'I call him my beloved, you know, because "Bernard" is too familiar, when you're talking to strangers, and "Mr. Aglionby" sounds stiff, doesn't it?'

'I quite agree with you. Your beloved's aspect, just at present, is somewhat gloomy.'

'My! Yes! He does look as cross as two sticks. But,' with sudden animation, 'I've seen that girl before, who's going to dance with Sir Gabriel. Who is she?'

'She is Miss Conisbrough, of Yoresett.'

'Conisbrough—oh, of course! One of those girls who wanted to have Bernard's money,' said Miss Vane, tossing her head. 'Well, just fancy! only Miss Conisbrough! From her dress, and Sir Gabriel's dancing with her, I thought she must be a *somebody*.'

'Miss Conisbrough doesn't go out much, I

think,' said the young man, instinctively speaking with caution, and unable, for his own part, to resist looking with admiration at the lady in question. 'Your "beloved" seems to know her, though.'

While Lizzie was explaining, her partner advanced, and suggested to Sir Gabriel that he and Miss Vane would be happy to be their *vis-à-vis*. So it was arranged, and Bernard retired, after forcing a smile in answer to a coquettish nod from his betrothed. After this dance Judith found no lack of partners. She was forced to dance, and Aglionby saw her led off time after time, and congratulated himself on having secured her promise concerning supper.

As for Delphine, she had not been in the drawing-room after the first five minutes following her arrival. Judith purposely avoided noticing her. She had a vague consciousness that she was dancing a good deal with Randulf Danesdale, and while her reason condemned, her heart condoned, and even

sympathised with the imprudence. Even she herself, after a time, fell into the spirit of the dance, and began to rejoice in the mere pleasure of the swift rhythmic motion. Though calm and cool outwardly, she was wrought up to a pitch of almost feverish excitement, and, as is often the case with excitement of that kind, she was able distinctly and vividly to note every small circumstance connected with the course of the evening. She remembered her mother's words, 'They shall see who it is that has been passed over,' and she could not but perceive that both she and her sister attracted a great deal of attention; that men were led up and introduced to them oftener, on the whole, than they were to other girls—that, in fact, they created a sensation—were a success. She supposed, then, that her mother was right. If they had had that 'position' which she so coveted for them, they would not be counted nonentities in it.

Judith also saw, with a woman's quickness

in such matters, that which poor Bernard never perceived, the fact, namely, that though Lizzie Vane got plenty of partners, and was apparently made much of, yet that many of her partners were laughing at her, and drawing her out, and that they laughed together about her afterwards; and lastly—most significant fact of all—that scarce a woman noticed or spoke to her, except Miss Danesdale, who, as hostess, was in a measure obliged to do so.

Gradually she yielded to the spell of the dance, the music, the excitement of it all; to the unspoken prompting within, 'Enjoy yourself now, while you may. Let to-morrow take care of itself.' Go where she would, dance with whom she would, before the dance was over, sooner or later, once or oftener, as it happened, but inevitably, she met Bernard's dark eyes, and read what they said to her. When supper-time came, and he led her in, and poured out wine for her, and asked her in a low voice if she had ever

been to Scar Foot, if she had ever even walked past it since she had ceased to be his guest, Judith answered, with a vibrating voice:

'No, I could not; and of my own free will I will not.'

He smiled, but said little more during the meal. The supper was served in brilliant fashion in an enormous room, at numbers of smallish round tables. Those who had time and attention to spare for the arrangements said it was a fairy scene, with its evergreens, its hot-house flowers, and delicate ferns and perfumed fountains. Judith and Aglionby saw nothing of that; they forced some kind of an indifferent conversation, for under the eyes of that crowd, and surrounded by those brilliant lights, anything like confidential behaviour was impossible. Now and then they were greeted by shouts of especially loud laughter from another part of the room, elicited by some peculiarly piquant sally of Miss Vane's, which charmed the chorus of

men around her, and gave a deeper flush of triumph to her cheeks.

Just as the noise and laughter were at their height, and the fun was becoming faster, Aglionby said to Judith :

'Let us go away. This isn't amusing.'

They rose. So did nearly everyone else at the same time, but not to go. Some one had said something, which Judith and Aglionby, absorbed in themselves, had not heard, and a dead silence succeeded to the tumultuous noise. Then a clock was heard striking—a deep-toned stroke, which fell twelve times, and upon the last sound the storm of laughter broke loose, and a tempest of hand-shaking and congratulations broke out.

'A happy new year to you! I wish you a happy new year!'

'Here's to the peaceful interment of the old year, and the joyful beginning of the new one!'

Aglionby looked at Judith. His lips were open, but he paused. No; he must not

wish her a happy new year. He knew he must not; and he was silent. Many others had now finished supper. They, too, left the room, and seated themselves, after wandering about a little, in a kind of alcove with a cushioned seat, of which there were many in the hall. Then—for they were as much alone as if not another creature had been near them—Aglionby at once resumed the topic he had been dwelling on all supper-time.

'You have never been near Scar Foot since that day. That means that you are still relentless?' said he, regarding her steadily, but with entreaty in his eyes, and a decided accent of the same kind in his voice.

'It means that I must be—must seem so, at least,' she replied, dreamily.

'Pardon me, but I cannot see it in that light.'

'That means, that you do not believe me?'

'No; I mean that if you would only state

your reasons, and tell me the obstacle *you* see to our friendship, that I could demolish it, let it be what it might.'

'Oh no, you could not,' said Judith, her heart beating with a wild pleasure in thus, as it were, dancing on the edge of a precipice. 'You do not know: it *could* not be swept away.'

'And I say it could—it could, Judith, if you would only allow it.'

She started slightly, as he spoke her name, and bit her lips; but she could not summon up her strength of will to rebuke him.

'What—why do you say such things? What makes you think so?' she asked, tremulously.

Aglionby took her fan, and bent towards her, as if fanning her with it; but while his hand moved regularly and steadily to and fro, he spoke to her, with all the earnestness of which he was capable, and with eyes which seemed to burn into hers—yet with a tenderness in his voice which he could not subdue.

'Because you do not trust me. Because you will not believe what to me is so simple and such a matter of course—that no reason you could assert could make me your enemy. Because there is *no* offence I would not condone. Pah! Condone?—forgive, forget, wipe clean away, to have the goodwill and the friendship of you and yours. *Now* do you understand?'

Judith turned paler; she shut her eyes involuntarily, and drew a long breath. Could it be possible that he suspected—that he had the slightest inkling of her real reason for maintaining the distance between them for which she had stipulated? His words hit home to the very core and eye of her distress. The peril was frightful, imminent, and she had herself attracted it by allowing him to advance thus far, by herself sporting with deadly weapons. He was watching her, with every sense on the alert, and he saw how, unconsciously, her hands clasped; she gave a little silent gasp and start, and there actually

did steal into his mind, only to be dismissed again, the wonder, 'Can it be that there really is some offence which she deems irreparable?'

'Hush!' she said at last. 'It was very wrong of me to allow the subject to be mentioned. And you do not keep your promise. You know that you promised me at Scar Foot, Mr. Aglionby——'

'You also promised *me* at Scar Foot, and then demanded your promise back again,' said he, resolved that if he had to give way again (and what else could a man do, when a woman appealed to him for mercy?) that she should buy the concession hard.

'I have told you I cannot explain,' she said, almost despairingly. 'Do you mean to make me go over it all again?' A rush of sudden tears filled her eyes. 'Do you mean to make me plead it all a second time?'

'I should like to make you do it—yes. And, at the end of all, I should like to refuse

what you ask,' he said, with a savage tenderness in his voice.

Judith looked steadily at him for a short time, as if to test whether he was in earnest or not, and then said, in a dull, dead voice, 'I wish I were dead;' and looked at the ground.

This was more than he could bear.

'Forgive me, Judith!' he whispered. 'If you can, forgive me. I will not sin again, but it is hard.'

'Yes, it is hard,' she replied, more composed, as the terror she had felt on hearing him talk about 'offences' and 'condonation' began to subside. 'It is hard. But making scenes about it will make it none the easier. We have our duties, both of us—you as a man——'

More peals of laughter, as a noisy group came out of the supper-room—half a dozen young men, and Miss Vane in the midst of them, laughing in no gentle tones, and holding in her hand, high above her head, a

flower, towards which one of the said young gentlemen occasionally stretched a hand, amidst the loud hilarity of the lady and her companions. The party made their way towards the ballroom, and Miss Vane was heard crying:

'I'm sure I never promised to dance it with you. Here's my programme. Look and see!'

They disappeared.

Judith's face burned. She looked timidly at Aglionby, who was gazing after the group, his face pale, his eyes mocking, his lips sneering. He laughed, not a pleasant laugh.

'We all have our duties, as you most justly remark. Mine is to marry that young lady, and cease to persecute you with my importunities. I see that is what you were thinking. And you are quite right.'

'*You* are quite wrong,' said Judith. 'What I do think is that you are not behaving kindly to her to allow her to—to—

she is so young and inexperienced—and so pretty.'

'And you and your sister are so old and wise, and so hideous,' he rejoined, with a bitter laugh. 'That alone is enough to account for your different style of behaviour. No. Do not try to palliate it.'

'I think you are to blame,' Judith persisted. 'You have no right to do it—to leave her with all those silly, empty-headed young men. It is not fair. You ought to take——'

'Take her home—and myself too. A good idea. I am sure the carriage will be round by now. But you?'

'Take me to the drawing-room, please. I dare say Mrs. Malleson will also be ready to go.'

He gave her his arm. Mrs. Malleson was soon found, seated on a sofa, with Delphine beside her, looking a little pale, and exceedingly tired. Bernard wished them good-night, and went to the ballroom. He had seen Mrs. Bryce in the drawing-room,

and found that she was quite ready to go. In the dancing-room there was a momentary pause between two dances. Bernard saw Randulf Danesdale promenading with a young lady on his arm, with whom he seemed to be in earnest conversation. At the further end of the room he saw that fatal pink dress; heard the same shrill, affected tones, and the chorus of laughter that followed on them. Nothing could have been more distasteful to him in his present mood than to have even to speak to her, after his parting from Judith Conisbrough. But he walked straight up to the group, most of whom he knew slightly by this time, and offering his arm to his betrothed, said gravely:

'Lizzie, I am sorry to break off your amusement, but it is very late; we have ten miles to drive, and Mrs. Bryce is tired, and wishes to go.'

'Oh, Aglionby, don't take Miss Vane away! The light of the evening will be gone. Don't look so down, man! Miss

Vane, don't let him drag you off in that way. I am down for a dance.'

'And I,' 'And I,' cried several voices.

Bernard's face did not relax. He could not unstiffen his features into a smile. He looked directly at Lizzie, as mildly as he could, and repeated that he was very sorry, but he was afraid he must ask her to come away.

'Oh, Bernard!' she began, but then something unusual in his expression struck her. A feeling of something like chill alarm crossed her heart. How dignified he looked! How commanding! How different—even she knew—from the feather-brained fops with whom she had even now been jesting and laughing!

'Well, if I must, I must, I suppose,' she said, shrugging her shoulders, and taking his arm. And with a final farewell to her attendants, she went away with her 'lover.'

'Jove! but that girl is a caution!' observed one of the young men, giving unrestrained

flow to his mirth, as Bernard and his betrothed disappeared. 'I never had such fun in my life!'

'She'll find it a caution, being married to Aglionby,' said a second, looking into the future. 'Didn't you see him as he came up to us? Lucifer himself couldn't have looked more deuced stiff.'

'Yes—I saw. They don't look exactly as if they were created to run in a pair!' said the first speaker, musingly. 'But why on earth does he leave her to herself in such a way?'

'He's been dancing attendance on the eldest Miss Conisbrough all evening, and left this little girl to amuse herself with suitable companions.'

'On Miss Conisbrough—why, I thought they were at daggers drawn.'

'Didn't look like it, I assure you. I can't make it out, I confess. Only, on my honour, they were as good-looking a couple as any in the room. Couldn't help noticing them.

But look here, St. John—will you take the odds—ten to one—that it doesn't come off?'

'The wedding?—all right. At all—or within a year?'

'Oh, hang a year!—at all. Ten to one that Aglionby and the little dressmaker don't get married at all.'

'Yes; but there must be some time fixed. Ten to one that it's broken off within a year.'

'In sovs? Done with you!'

Then the band struck up again for one of the last waltzes, and the young men dispersed to find their partners for the same.





CHAPTER II.

RANDULF.

THE ball had been kept up until morning, if not till daylight. When people began to stroll in to the very late breakfast at Danesdale Castle not a lady was to be seen amongst them, save one intrepid damsel, equally renowned for her prowess in the chase, and her unwearying fleetness in the ballroom.

As she appeared, in hat and habit, she was greeted with something like applause, which was renewed when she announced that she had every intention of sharing the day's run. Sir Gabriel, in his pink (for no ball would

have caused him to be absent at the meet), gallantly placed her beside himself, and apologised for his daughter's absence.

'Philippa has no "go" left in her after these stirs,' he remarked; 'and a day's hunting takes her a week to get over; but I'm glad to see that you are less delicate, my dear.'

'We shall not have many ladies, I think,' said she, smiling, and looking round upon the thinned ranks of the veterans.

Here the door opened, just as breakfast was nearly over, and Sir Gabriel paused in astonishment in the midst of his meal.

'What, Ran? You!' he ejaculated, as his son entered, equipped, he also, for riding to hounds. 'The last thing I should have expected. If anyone had asked me, I should have said you were safe in bed till lunch-time.'

'You would have been wrong, it seems,' replied Randulf, on whom the exertions of the previous evening appeared to have had

worse effects than they had upon Miss Bird, the bright-looking girl who was going to ride.

Miss Bird was an heiress; the same pretty girl with whom Randulf had been walking about the ballroom the night before, when Aglionby had come to call Lizzie away.

Randulf himself looked pale, and almost haggard, and was listless and drawling beyond his wont. Sir Gabriel eyed him over, and his genial face brightened. Of course it was bad form to display fondness for your relations in the presence of others. Every Englishman knows that, and Sir Gabriel as well as any of them; but it was always with difficulty that he refrained from smiling with joy every time his eyes met those of his 'lad.' He looked also more kindly than ever upon Miss Bird, who was a favourite of his, more especially when Randulf carried his cup of tea round the table and dropped into the vacant place by her side.

The meet took place at a certain park, a

couple of miles from Danesdale Castle, and soon after breakfast a procession of six—Miss Bird, Sir Gabriel, his son, and three other men who were of their party—set off for it. It was a still, cloudy day, with a grey sky and lowering clouds, which, however, were pretty high, for all the hill-tops were clear.

That was a long and memorable run in the annals of Danesdale fox-hunting—'a very devil of a fox!' as Sir Gabriel said, which led them a cruel and complicated chase over some of the roughest country in the district. Sir Gabriel, as will easily be understood, was a keen sportsman himself, and had been a little disappointed with Randulf's apparent indifference to fox, or any other, hunting. He had put it down to his long sojourn abroad with people who, according to Sir Gabriel's ideas, knew no more about hunting than a London street Arab does, who has never stepped on anything but flags in his life. He had always trusted that the boy

would mend of such outlandish indifference, and he certainly had no cause to complain of his lack of spirit to-day.

Sir Gabriel was lost in amazement. He could not understand the lad. Randulf's face—the pale face which he had brought with him into the breakfast-room—never flushed in the least: his eyebrows met in a straight line across his forehead. He seemed to look neither to right nor to left, but urged his horse relentlessly at every chance of a leap, big or little, but the uglier and the bigger the better it seemed, till his father, watching him, began to feel less puzzled than indignant. A good day's run, Sir Gabriel would have argued, was a good day's run; but to drive your horse wilfully and wantonly at fences which might have been piled by Satan himself, and at gaps constructed apparently on the most hideous of man-and-horse-trap principles, went against all the baronet's traditions; for all his life he had been very 'merciful to his beast,' holding his horse in

almost as much respect as himself. He had always credited Randulf with the same feelings, and his conduct this day was bewildering, to say the least of it.

As Sir Gabriel and Miss Bird happened to be running almost neck and neck through a sloping field—the chase nearly at an end, the fox in full view at last, with the hounds in mad eagerness at his heels—suddenly a horseman flew past them, making straight for a most hideous-looking bit of fence, on the other side of which was the bed of a beck, full of loose stones, and in which the water in this winter season rushed along, both broad and deep.

All day long a feeling of uneasiness had possessed Sir Gabriel; this put the climax to it. Forgetting the glorious finish, now so near, he pulled his horse up short, crying:

'Good God! Is he mad?'

Miss Bird also wondered if he were mad, but put her own horse, without stopping, at a more reasonable-looking gap, consider-

ably to the left of the fence Randulf was taking.

Two seconds of horrible suspense, and—yes, his horse landed lightly and safely at the other side. Sir Gabriel wiped the sweat from his brow, and, caring nothing for the 'finish' or anything else, rode limply on to where, not Randulf, but another, was presenting the brush to the amiable Miss Bird.

'What the devil do you mean, sir, by riding at a fence like that, and frightening me out of my senses?' growled Sir Gabriel, at his son's elbow. The latter looked round, with the same white, pallid face, and far-off eyes, which the father had already noticed, and which had filled him with vague and nameless alarm. Randulf passed his hand across his eyes and said:

'What did you say?'

'What ails you, lad? What is the matter with you?' asked poor Sir Gabriel, his brown cheek turning ashy pale, and a feeling of sickly dread creeping over his heart.

'What ails me? Oh, nothing that I know of,' replied Randulf, with blank indifference, and then suddenly heaving such a sigh as comes only from the depths of a sick heart.

The laughter, and jesting, and joyous bustle of the finish were sounding all around them. No one took much notice of the two figures apart, apparently earnestly conversing. Neither Sir Gabriel nor Randulf was given to displaying his feelings openly in public, but Randulf knew, as well as if some one were constantly shouting it aloud from the house-tops, that his father worshipped him—that he was the light of his eyes and the joy of his life, and that to give him any real joy he would have sacrificed most things dear to him. And Sir Gabriel knew that his worship was not wasted upon any idol of clay or wood—that it fell gratefully into a heart which could appreciate and understand it. During the last month it had occasionally crossed his mind that Randulf was a little absent—somewhat more listless and indif-

ferent than usual; but the baronet had himself been unusually busied with magisterial and other concerns, and had scarcely had time to remark the subtle change. Of one thing he was now certain, that Randulf, as he saw him now, was a changed man from what he had been four-and-twenty hours ago. The poor old man felt hopelessly distressed. He knew not how to force the truth from a man who looked at him and said nothing ailed him, when it was patent to the meanest comprehension that, on the contrary, something very serious ailed him. He sat on his horse, looking wistfully into Randulf's face. The groups were dispersing. The young man, at last looking up, seemed to read what was passing in his father's mind, and said:

'I have something to say to you. Could we manage to ride home alone? How will Miss Bird do?'

Sir Gabriel's face brightened quickly. If Randulf had 'something to say' to him, no doubt that communication would quickly put

to rights all these shadowy disquietudes which troubled him.

'I'll arrange for Miss Bird to be escorted,' he said; and, turning round, he requested the man who had already presented her with the brush to see her safely to Danesdale Castle, as a matter of business obliged him and Randulf to ride home by Scar Foot. The youth yielded a joyful assent, and went off rejoicing in charge of his 'fair.' Sir Gabriel and Randulf, with a general 'Good-afternoon' to the rest of the party, turned their horses' heads in a southerly direction. Scar Foot was a little distance away, further south, and then there were ten miles to ride to Danesdale Castle.

They soon found themselves in a deep lane, beneath the grey and clouded afternoon sky of New Year's Day. Behind them, Addlebrough reared his bleak, blunt summit, and the other fells around looked sullen under the sullen sky. It was Randulf who had proposed the ride, but still he did not speak, till

Sir Gabriel asked, in a voice which he strove to make indifferent :

'What did you make of the dance last night, Randulf? Philippa informed me before she went to bed that it had been a success.'

'A success, was it ?' said Randulf, indifferently. 'I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure. I don't know anything about it.'

'What did you think of Aglionby's intended ?' pursued Sir Gabriel.

'Miss Vane ? Pooh! She may be his *intended;* it will never go any further.'

'I should hope not, I'm sure. What a mistake for a man of that calibre to make! It shows what soft spots there are in the strongest heads.'

Silence again for a short time, until Sir Gabriel, resolutely plunging into a serious topic, said :

'Well, surely there were lots of nice girls there. Did none of them strike your fancy ?'

'Surely I've seen most of them before.'

'Well, I'll tell you which girl I like the best of the lot. I wish you could see her in the light I should like, Randulf.'

'And which was she?' asked Randulf, with a sudden appearance of animation and eagerness.

'Evelyn Bird.'

'Oh!' There was profound indifference in Randulf's tone. Sir Gabriel went on steadily:

'It is time, without any jesting, that you began to think about marrying. I've thought about it often, lately. An only son is in a different position from——'

Randulf looked drearily around him. They were passing the back of Scar Foot just now, and the profoundest silence seemed to reign there. Slowly their horses mounted the slope of the road which was for Randulf, and for one or two others, haunted with the memories that do not die. The lake lay below them, looking dull and dismal—the ice with which it had been covered turning rapidly to slush

in the thaw-wind—its wall of naked fells uncheered by even a ray of sunshine. Randulf remembered certain other rides he had taken along this road, and walks too which he had had there. He glanced towards his father, and in that kindly face he read trouble and perturbation: he knew that that brave old head was filled with plans for his happiness, his welfare—with schemes for securing gladness to him long after those white hairs should be laid low. Yet it was long before he could summon up words in which to answer his father's last remark. At last he said:

'I know what you mean, sir; I wish I could gratify you, but you must not expect me to marry yet.'

Deep disappointment fell like a cloud over Sir Gabriel's face, as he said:

'Boy, boy! was that what you brought me out here to tell me?'

'Partly; not altogether. It was because I wanted to be alone with you, and make a clean breast of it.'

He paused. 'A clean breast of it?' Vague visions of dread floated through Sir Gabriel's mind—dreams of foreign adventuresses who entrapped innocent youth into marriages which were a curse and a clog to them all their days. Was his boy, of whom he was so proud, going to unfold some such history to him now? Randulf's next words somewhat relieved him.

'I know you wish me to marry, and I know the sort of girl you would like me to marry, but surely you would not have denied me some tether—some free choice of my own?'

'Bless the lad! Of course not. Every Englishman chooses his own wife, and with the example before me of old John, and the results of his severity——'

'Just so,' said Randulf, with rather a wan smile. 'I've had something on my mind for a good while now. *I* wanted to marry too. My only doubt was, what you would say to the girl I wanted to have, and I had fully

meant to talk it all over with you, and tell you all about it, before I did anything.' Randulf raised his eyes full to his father's anxious face. 'I wanted to marry Delphine Conisbrough.'

'Good Lord!' broke involuntarily from Sir Gabriel.

'You don't know her much, I think. I was not going to do anything rashly. For though I love her—better than my life—I knew that whoever I married, you must have a great deal to say in the matter—as it is right you should. I intended to get you to see her, to learn to know her a little better, before you said anything one way or another. You would have consented to my wish—most certainly you would have consented. I heard what you said about her last night, to her sister—about some men's heads being turned by her beauty. Ah, it's not only her beauty—it is everything. But if it were only that, you cannot deny that she surpassed all the women there, in looks?'

He turned to his father with a sort of challenge in his voice and eyes.

'Well, who wants to deny it?' said Sir Gabriel. 'I own I was enchanted with her, and, as you say, not only with her beauty. But you must remember, my boy, that you have to think not only——'

'I know, I know,' said Randulf, with a little laugh, not of the gayest description. 'I had to think that if she had been one of this abominable old Aglionby's heiresses it would have been the most suitable thing in the world. But she just missed it—and of course a miss is as good as a mile. She was not so worthy of a wealthy young Admirable Crichton like me, in her poverty, as she might have been *with* the money and the acres. Bah!' He set his teeth, choking back a kind of sob of indignant passion at the picture his own fancy had conjured up, so that Sir Gabriel became very grave, realising that it was more than a mere flirtation or a passing fancy. 'I tell you she would have honoured

any man by becoming his wife. But that's not to the point. I had duties towards you —towards the best father a fellow ever had—and I knew it, and was resolved to have it out with you.'

'And suppose I had refused?'

'But you would have seen her, as I wished?'

'Naturally. But I might still have refused, finally. What did you propose to do in that case?'

'I wish you wouldn't ask me. I didn't *propose* to do anything—only I felt that if she would be my wife, my wife she should be, against all the world.'

'Well?' said Sir Gabriel, with a sigh; 'and what next?'

'The next is, that last night I lost my head the moment I saw her. From the instant she came into the room, I knew nothing, except that she was there. It was not of my own will that I left her side for an instant. She sent me away many times, and told me

to attend to what she called my duties. Well—there's no good in describing it all. I don't know what I may have done, or said, or looked like; a man doesn't know, when he's off his head like that. But she took the alarm, and asked me to take her back to Mrs. Malleson. She got up, and wanted to go out of the room. We were alone, in my study——'

'The deuce you were!' said Sir Gabriel, in displeasure.

'Yes, I know it was all wrong. I had no business to take her there. I had no business to do anything that I did. I can't exactly remember what I had said, but I saw her turn red and white, and then she started up, and said, "You must not say those things to me. Take me back to Mrs. Malleson, please, Mr. Danesdale." I begged her to wait a moment. She said no, if I would not take her she would go alone. I said she should not go yet, and I set my back against the door, and told her she should not leave

that room till she had promised to be my wife.'

'Well?' was all his father said, but he watched askance his son's face.

He could not understand it all. Randulf did not tell his tale by any means joyously. His words came from between his clenched teeth; his brow wore a dark frown, and his nostrils quivered now and then.

'If I had done wrong,' Randulf went on, 'I got my punishment pretty quickly, for she sat down again and looked at me, and said as composedly as possible, "No, that can never be." I had expected a different answer—yes, by —— I had!' he said passionately. 'I could have sworn from a thousand signs that she loved me, and she is no silly prude—pure-minded women never are prudes. And it was not coquetry. She could not coquette with a man in such a case. I felt as if she had shot me when she said that. There was a scene. I don't deny it. I forgot you—I forgot everything except that I loved her. I

couldn't take her answer—I would not. I begged her to tell me why she could not be my wife. First she made some objections about you; she said I had done wrong to ask her in that way. What would Sir Gabriel say? She reminded me that I was an only son'—he laughed again. 'I put all that aside. I told her it was no question of fathers and mothers and only sons, or of anything else, except the success or failure of our two lives. I said that I loved her, and she loved me; she gathered herself up, as it were, and said coldly, "No; you are mistaken. Now will you let me go?" Oh, sir, I ought to have let her go, I know. But I felt quite beside myself when I heard her say that. I refused to believe her. I repeated that it was not true—that I knew she loved me——'

'You did wrong,' said Sir Gabriel, sternly and coldly; 'and I cannot understand how a gentleman——'

'Don't say that to me!' said Randulf, looking at him with so haggard a face, lips

that twitched so ominously, that his father became silent. 'I cannot understand it now. I must have been mad. I'm concealing nothing from you. I went on telling her that I knew she loved me, and that she should never perjure herself while I could prevent it. I reminded her of this thing and that thing that she had said and done, and I asked her what they all meant, if not that she loved me. But I came to my senses at last, for I saw that she looked frightened——'

'And it required *that* to bring you to your senses—shame on you!' said his father, very angrily indeed.

'Yes, it required that,' replied Randulf, without noticing his father's tone. 'But when I did come to myself again, I humbly asked her pardon. I threw the door wide open, and said I would take her to Mrs. Malleson, or anywhere that she liked to go. I made her look at me, and I told her, "When I know you married to another man, then I

will believe you do not love me, but not till then."'

'And what did she say?'

Randulf turned his white face towards his father, and said, with a kind of wrathful triumph:

'She said *nothing*—she looked away. She took my arm, and we got into the drawing-room somehow; and she sat down beside Mrs. Malleson—ah, poor child!—with a white face, and a look in her eyes like you see in a bird's eyes when you've just shot it, and you pick it up and look at it. And I heard Mrs. Malleson say that she looked cold, and she shivered a little, and said yes, she was rather, and very tired. I said nothing. I think I bowed to her and came away. . . . But I've seen nothing, nothing since, but her eyes and her face, and herself creeping up to Mrs. Malleson. And if I see it much longer I shall go mad,' said Randulf, drawing a long, sobbing breath. 'Right before my eyes it has been ever since, so that I couldn't sleep.

It looked at me out of my glass while I dressed, till I flung a handkerchief over it. It was just before my eyes in the field all the morning. Why, do you suppose I rode as I did—not for the pleasure of catching a fox, but because *her face* was there before me, in its misery, just out of my reach, and I felt as if I must catch her, and kiss some life back into her eyes and her lips, or break my neck. And it's here now—there, just before me.'

He shuddered, and drew his hand across his eyes. Sir Gabriel was too disturbed to reply at once; too much astonished and, as it were, paralysed at the discovery of this fiery drama which had been going on under his very eyes without his knowing it, to speak. Yet he heard Randulf say darkly, half to himself:

'My poor little Delphine! What have they done to her? What have they said to her, that she should turn and stab herself and me in this way?'

Sir Gabriel was still silent, trying in vain

to make what he called 'sense' out of the story. When Randulf had first mentioned Delphine's name, his father's feeling had been one of strong disapproval. Lovely as she was, and charming, she had had neither the training, the position, nor the acquaintance with the world and society which he would have wished for, in a girl who was not only to be Randulf's bride, but, sometime, Lady Danesdale. Be it said for Sir Gabriel that by this time he had forgotten that, and considered only the deeper issues—his son's future happiness—the question of his joy or sorrow. He at last looked up, meaning to ask another question or two; he met Randulf's eyes, dull and clouded, now that his narrative was over, looking at him rather appealingly. Prudent questions, conventional doubts, were forgotten.

'My poor lad, I wish I could help you!'

'Ah, I knew *you* would understand,' said Randulf. 'But no one can help me now—except time. If she had consented, then

your help would have been everything ; now it is nothing.'

'Suppose I saw her?' suggested Sir Gabriel. 'Perhaps I could induce her to state her objection. It may be a shadow, after all. Girls do make important things out of such very trifles.'

'It was no shadow—to her, at any rate. It was some reason which she feels must outweigh all others. I tell you she looked like one stricken to death. It is when I think of her look, and of her fate, shut up there—horrible! With every joy cut off, and in such poverty——'

'They ought not to be in poverty, though, if Aglionby's feelings——'

'Do not misjudge Aglionby. He has been repulsed too. He would give his right hand to help them—they are his kinswomen, as he says. Every advance he attempts is repelled. He is in despair about it.'

'That's very odd.'

'Yes, very. But I do not know that we

have any right to inquire into their reasons for what they do.'

They rode on in silence again, for a long time, through Yoresett town and all along the lovely road to Stanniforth, and thence to Danesdale. It was shortly before they entered their own park, that Randulf began again:

'And now, sir, you won't resent it, if I am not counted in the list of Miss Bird's, or Miss Anybody's suitors, at present?'

'Heaven forbid! We understand one another now. After all, to look at it from a selfish point of view, you will be all my own for so much the longer. "My son's my son till he gets him a wife," you know. All I ask, my boy, is that you will be as open with me after a time, when any fresh scheme comes into your mind, or if you decide upon anything. You shall find me more than willing to arrange things as you wish them, if it is possible.'

'I know you will,' said Randulf. 'I sup-

pose these things can be lived down. It pleases me to think that you *would* have done as I wished; you would have taken it into consideration. . . . Sometime, when the time comes, and years are past, I suppose I shall find a wife—not like her, but some one who will marry me.'

Sir Gabriel did not answer this. He did not like it. It did not suit him. He would have preferred almost anything to this calm looking forward to a joyless future.

It had grown dark, and the wind was rising, as they drove into the courtyard of the castle. They had to put on one side all that had passed between them; their long ride together, and the emotions which filled both their hearts. The house was full of visitors. There would be fifteen or twenty guests at dinner; all the ball, and the hunt, and the dresses, and the incidents to be discussed. They took their part in it all bravely; and this courage brought with it balm, as moral courage, well carried out, infallibly does.



CHAPTER III.

LIZZIE'S CONSENT.

TOWARDS noon, on that same first of January, Miss Vane came slowly strolling into the parlour at Scar Foot, yawning undisguisedly, and looking around her with half-open eyes.

'Law, Bernard! you don't need any sleep, I do believe! You look as if nothing had happened.'

Aglionby forced a smile, and touched her forehead with his lips. As is usual in such cases, the less he felt to care for her, the more anxiously did he make himself *aux petits soins* on her behalf, drawing an easy-chair to

the fire for her, placing a footstool, putting a screen into her hand—delicate attentions which, a year ago, when he had first had the felicity of calling her his own, it had never entered into his head to render.

'I am not fatigued, certainly,' he said. 'My aunt has been downstairs a good while, too.'

'Oh, but she wasn't dancing; I was. My word! But it is a grand house, Bernard, that Danesdale Castle; and they are grand people, too. I don't like Miss Danesdale a bit, though. Stiff little thing! And I thought some of the other ladies were very stiff, too. I guess some of them didn't like sitting out when the gentlemen were talking to me.'

'Very likely not,' said Bernard, with a praiseworthy endeavour to appreciate the joke.

'I heard one of them say,' pursued Lizzie, with a musing and complacent smile, 'she said, "Why on earth doesn't Mr. Aglionby look after her? It's atrocious!" So you see

you were not considered to be doing your duty. I dare say if you, or anybody else, had been looking after *her*, she wouldn't have felt so ill-tempered.'

Lizzie laughed, and Bernard's face flushed, for he interpreted the remark in a wholly different and less flattering sense than that suggested by Lizzie.

'I hope the Hunt Ball will be half as jolly,' pursued Miss Vane. 'Eh, and did you see those Miss Conisbroughs, Bernard? But of course you did, because I saw you talking to one of them. I wonder you condescended to speak to them, after all their designs to keep you out——'

She paused suddenly, with her remark arrested, her eyes astonished, gazing into Aglionby's face.

'You are quite mistaken,' said he, in a voice which, though quiet, bit even her. 'You must not speak in that manner of my cousins. They had no "designs," as you call them. They have been most shamefully

treated; and in short, my dear, I will not allow you to mention them unless you can speak more becomingly of them.'

'Upon my word! Well, they can't be so badly off, anyhow; and look at their dresses! Lovely dresses they were! and that youngest one is sweetly pretty, only she does her hair so queerly; there's no style about it, all hanging loose in loops, where everyone else wears theirs small and neat. But she is pretty, certainly. The eldest one I don't admire a bit, she's like a marble figure.'

'Are you talking about the lady Bernard took in to supper?' asked Mrs. Bryce, joining in the colloquy for the first time.

'Yes, I am, Mrs. Bryce.'

'I thought her one of the truest gentlewomen I ever saw,' said Mrs. Bryce, counting the stitches of her knitting. 'Her manners are perfect, wherever they were acquired; but I should say that "grand air" is natural to her, isn't it, Bernard?'

'Entirely, aunt. She always has it.'

'Yes, I thought so. One can see at once when that sort of thing is natural.'

'Well, I thought her the stiffest, proudest creature I ever saw. I couldn't tell why she gave herself such airs,' said Miss Vane. Here Bernard abruptly left the room, unable to bear it any longer, and Mrs. Bryce continued calmly :

'I am afraid you are no judge of manner, my dear ; and I wonder at your speaking in that way of Bernard's cousins.'

'Cousins, indeed! Pretty cousins! Much notice they would have taken of him if they had come into the money.'

'And *à propos* of manner,' continued Mrs. Bryce, who seemed resolved thoroughly to do her duty as chaperon, 'let me recommend you to tone yours down a little. Try to make it rather more like that of the young ladies we have been talking about, and then perhaps there will not be so many comments passed upon it, as I heard last night.'

'Comments!' cried Miss Vane, angrily.

'What do you mean? Does anyone dare to say that I behaved badly?'

'Not badly, my dear; but what, in the society you were in last night, means almost the same thing—ignorantly. At the Hunt Ball, if I were you, I would not put on that pink gown, and I would keep a little more with Bernard, and myself, and——'

'I'll just tell you this—I won't go to the Hunt Ball at all,' said Lizzie, with passionate anger, wounded in her tenderest feelings. 'I hate all these grand, stuck-up people with their false ways, like that nasty proud Miss Conisbrough. I won't go near the Hunt Ball. They may whistle for me.' (Mrs. Bryce's face assumed an expression of silent anguish as these amenities of speech were hurled at her.) 'And what's more, I shall tell Bernard this very day, that I wouldn't live at this horrid, dull old place, if he would give me twice the money he has. I must have society. I must have my f—friends,' sobbed Miss Vane, breaking down.

Mrs. Bryce smiled slightly, but said nothing. She had a strong impression that her nephew, and not Lizzie, would decide, both whether they went to the Hunt Ball or not, and whether they lived at Scar Foot. He eame in again at that moment, with a letter-bag. Lizzie speedily dried her eyes, and watched him while he opened it; came behind his chair, in fact, and looked at all the envelopes, as he took them out.

'That's for me,' she said, stretching out a slim hand, from over his shoulder. 'It's from Lucy Golding. She promised to write.'

'Did Percy promise to write, too?' asked Bernard, arresting the same slim fingers as they made a snatch at the next letter. 'Because if this isn't Percy's fist, I'll——'

'You need not say what you'll do, sir,' was the coquettish reply. 'It *is* Percy's "fist," as you call it. Most likely it's a New Year's card. We are old friends. I sent him one at Christmas, and I don't see why he shouldn't return the compliment.'

'Oh, certainly. There is absolutely no just cause or impediment, to my knowledge,' replied Bernard, with supreme indifference. 'There's another—your mother's handwriting, isn't it.'

'Yes, it is. I wonder what she's doing with herself to-day.'

'Aunt, here is one for you, the last of the batch,' he said, rising, and taking it to her; while he collected together his own, which looked chiefly like business letters, newspapers, etc., and took them to a side-table.

Mrs. Bryce read her letter, and then remarked that she would go into the drawing-room and answer it at once. Lizzie and Bernard were left alone. He began to open his papers; his mind pure of any speculation on the subject of her correspondence. Why did she take herself as far away from him as possible, as she opened her letters? In perusing one of them, at least, her face flushed; her foot tapped the floor. She

finished them, put them all into her pocket, and took up the strip of lace she was supposed to be working. Perhaps the prolonged silence struck Bernard, for, suddenly raising his face from the intent perusal of a leading article, he perceived Lizzie, said to himself, 'Now for it,' laid his paper down, and went to her side.

During the sleepless vigil he had kept last night, he had made up his mind as to his immediate course. He would talk to Lizzie today, make her fix the day for their marriage, as early a day as he could get her to name. Then they would be married, and he supposed things would somehow work themselves right after that event. He could live a calm, if joyless, life; plan out some scheme of work that would take up a good deal of time. One could not go on being wretched for ever; and one's feet by degrees harden, to suit a stony path. He had got engaged to this girl; she had not refused him in his poverty; he had kept her to himself for a year, and thus

hindered her from having any other chances. To try to break it off now that he was in such utterly different circumstances would indeed be a pitiful proceeding. He knew that, and it was a proceeding of which he was not going to be guilty. He knew now that she was everything he would rather she had not been. It was now a matter of constant astonishment to him that he could ever even have thought himself in love with her. A sense of shame and degradation burnt through him every time he realised how easily he had yielded to the sensuous spell exercised by a pretty face and a pair of beguiling blue eyes; how densely blind he must have been to have imagined that the soul, or what did duty for the soul behind that face, could ever satisfy him. But it was done: it must be carried through.

Perhaps he began somewhat abruptly. At least she looked very much startled as he said:

'Put down your work, Lizzie. I want to

have a talk with you. How many months in the year do you think you can spend at Scar Foot, when we are married?'

'Months, Bernard!' she cried; 'oh, don't ask me to do that! I'm very sorry, I am really, because I know you like this place, though I can't for the life of me imagine why, but I really *couldn't* live here. I should go melancholy mad.'

'Then you shall not live here,' said he, promptly. 'I shall keep the place up, because I shall often run down myself and spend a few days at it.' (In imagination, he felt the soothing influence of the place, the asylum it would be, the refuge, from Irkford and from Lizzie.) 'But you shall live in town, since you prefer it, and you shall yourself choose the house and the neighbourhood.'

'Oh, that will be nice!' said Lizzie. 'I shall like that. Then I shall have all my old friends round me. Bernard, it's a load off my mind—it is, really.'

He took her hand.

'I am glad if it pleases you, dear. And now, one other thing, Lizzie. Houses can be looked after any time, and there are plenty of them to be had at Irkford. But when will you let me take you to live in that house that we are speaking of?'

She looked at him hastily, and turned first red, then pale, so that he congratulated himself on having taken a straightforward course, for she loved him, poor Lizzie, and it would have been shameful indeed to play her false.

'When?' faltered Lizzie, and looked at him and thought how dark and grim-looking he was, and how much graver and sterner he had become since he left Irkford. If he were always going to be like this—he never now said anything soothing or pleasant to her; he was dreadfully severe-looking.

'Yes, when, dear? I suppose the house is not to be taken just to stand empty. Some one will have to go and live in it—you and I, surely.'

'Yes, yes; I suppose so,' said Lizzie, slowly and constrainedly, and dropping her eyes.

'Well, all I want to know is, when. Sometime soon, surely. There can be nothing in the way now. For my part, I don't see why it should be put off more than a week or two.'

'Oh no! Impossible!' she cried, crimsoning, and speaking with such vehemence as surprised him.

'Recollect, we have been engaged more than a year. We have only been waiting till we could be married. Now that we can, why put it off any longer?'

'It is so fearfully sudden,' said she, startled out of her affectation, and fumbling nervously with her handkerchief.

As a lover he was sombre enough. As a husband—almost immediately? There must be no more New Year's cards from old friends, when Bernard was her husband.

'Fearfully sudden—well, say in a month or

two, though I call that rather hard lines. But —this is January—why not in the beginning of March?'

'March is so stormy and cold; it would be a bad omen to be married in a storm,' said she, laughing nervously. 'No, a little later than March.'

'Fix your own time, then, dear; only don't put it off too long.'

'Suppose we said the end of May or the beginning of June,' suggested Lizzie, plaiting her handkerchief into folds, which she studied with the deepest interest.

He uttered an exclamation of dismay. Five months longer of unrest, misery, suspense, waiting for a new order of things. The idea was terrible. He felt that he could not face it. He could make the sacrifice if it were to be done at once, but to have to wait— it could not be. He set himself to plead in earnest with his betrothed—at least, with him it was pleading—to her it seemed more like an imperious demand. He said he thought

there was a little estrangement between them, which caused him pain.

He begged her not to be so hard. His gravity and earnestness oppressed her more and more. The darkest forebodings assailed Lizzie as to her future happiness with this Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance.

She had no fixed plan; he had: therefore he prevailed. He would have prevailed in any case, by his superior strength of will, as he had done at the very first when his imperious manner and tones had almost repelled her, and when yet he had contrived to gain his own way. He gained it again. He made her promise that they should be married at the end of April: he promised her on his side all manner of things. He completely reversed her decision about the Hunt Ball. She would go with him, she meekly said. All these things she promised and vowed, and at last he let her go, having promised, on his part, to take her home to Irkford the day after the Hunt Ball. She said that if they

were to be married so soon she would want all her time for preparation—and to be with her mother, Lizzie added, almost piteously. And then she made her escape, looking exceedingly tired, and very much disturbed. He being left alone, realised with a singular clearness and vividness these comforting facts;

First, that it was with the greatest difficulty that he had succeeded in maintaining a tranquil and affectionate manner towards his dearest Lizzie. Secondly, that never had there been so little sympathy or even mutual understanding between them as now, when they had just agreed upon the very day of their marriage. Thirdly, that though she was a wilful girl, with plenty of likes and dislikes, yet he was completely her master the instant it pleased him to be so. That he could make her yield to him and obey him in whatsoever he chose, but that he could not—charm he never so wisely—make her agree with him by light of reason and under-

standing, could not make her like his way, or like doing it—could not, in a word, change her nature, though he could subdue it: a pleasing discovery, perhaps, for the tyrant by nature, who loves always to have the whip in his hand, and to see his slaves crouch as he comes in sight, but a most galling one to Bernard Aglionby.

A cheering prospect! he thought. A wife who, if he left her entirely to her own devices, would constantly be doing things which would jar upon all his feelings and wishes—who had not force of character enough to heartily oppose him—who would unwillingly, servilely obey, puzzled and uncomfortable, but not approving. What a noble, elevated character he would feel himself, with such a life-companion by his side! Perhaps in time, she would become like some women whom he had seen now and then—quite broken in; having no will or opinion of her own, turning appealing eyes to their lords upon every question. Hideous prospect! Would it

ever come to that? Which evil would be the lesser? The woman whom he was to marry was a fool—that fact was clearly enough revealed to him. It depended upon him whether she should be an independent fool, unrestrained, and at liberty to vaunt her folly; or whether she should be a fool tamed and docile, making no disturbance, but cringing like a spaniel. He had the power to make her into either of these things. It was not a pleasing alternative. He would have preferred a companion; one whose intelligence, even if exerted in opposition to his own, should be on something like a level with it. But that was never to be. Lizzie was his: he had wooed her, won her; since she loved and trusted in him, he must wear her—and make the best of it.

* * * * *

Less than a week afterwards, Aglionby escorted his betrothed home. The Hunt Ball was over; it had been more of a success,

so far as decorum and strict propriety of demeanour went, than that at Danesdale Castle, but Lizzie had not enjoyed it one half so much. The Miss Conisbroughs, whom she honoured with her peculiar dislike, had not been there. Randulf Danesdale had, looking very pale, behaving very courteously; but, as it seemed to Miss Vane, chillingly; dancing very little, and apparently considered a dull partner by the young ladies whom he did lead out. A dull ball, she vowed to herself, and she was ready to come away early. It was on the day following that Aglionby escorted her home. They had not much to say to one another on the way. Bernard's thoughts were busied with the future, and that disagreeably. Lizzie's were engrossed with a letter which lay at that moment in her pocket. It had come in an envelope addressed by Lucy Golding, and when Bernard had given it to her, he had casually remarked:

'You and Miss Golding seem great allies,

Lizzie. I didn't know there was such an affection between you.'

'Oh, she's quite an old friend,' Lizzie had replied.

But the handwriting of the letter was not the handwriting of the address.

In truth, Lizzie was in greater perplexity of mind than she ever had felt before. The one thing that bound her to Bernard was his wealth, and the position he had to offer her. All her feelings, inclinations, associations, inclined to Percy, who had lately been raised to a responsible post in the bank in which he served, and who was now in a position to support a wife in great comfort. Percy had addressed words of the deepest pathos and the most heartrending despair to her, and she was distracted what to do with him—now more than ever, for her taste of aristocratic society had not altogether been palatable; and as for Bernard, she felt chilled every time she looked at him. It was not as if he maintained even his former brusque fondness

and affection. He seemed to have changed entirely. She had been able to laugh at the brusquerie, knowing that it needed but a caress on her part to soften his most rugged mood. But now there was nothing rugged to be softened—only an imperturbable and majestic courtesy which literally overwhelmed her; and a gravity which nothing seemed to have power to lighten. To have to live with him always—if he were always going to be like that—was a prospect which appalled her. She shrank, too, from before his strong will. She did not wish to do the things he wished her to do, but when he persisted; when he fixed his eyes upon her, and took her hand in his strong grasp, and spoke in what no doubt he intended for a kind voice, but which was a voice that most distinctly said, 'Obey!' then she felt her heart beat wildly—felt a passionate desire to angrily fling off his hand and say, 'I will not!' and wrench herself free; felt at the same time a horrible hot sensation which was stronger than she was,

so that she always ended by submitting to him.

He seldom caused her to have this sensation, it is true—she had felt it when he forbade her to speak slightingly of his cousins, and in the conversation that followed—but it was a sensation which left a smart behind it long after the first rush of it was over : it left her quivering, angry, yet helpless ; confused and miserable. In a word, it was the sensation of fear. She feared her master because she was incapable of understanding him. It was not a happy state of things. Looked at from Lizzie's point of view, she was a misunderstood being—a *femme incomprise.* And I am not sure that there was not a great deal of truth in her view of the case.

Bernard only stayed two or three days at Irkford ; long enough to choose and take a house, and to give Lizzie *carte blanche* as to the furnishing of it. He said he would go and see after Scar Foot being brightened up a little, and Miss Vane said yes, that was a

very good idea. If she wanted him, she was to send for him, he said; and Lizzie said yes, she would. He would in any case be sure to come and see her before April, he added; and Lizzie said yes, indeed, she hoped he would; only he was to be sure and let her know before he did come, which he promised.

He called to see Percy, and thought his old friend was stiff and ungenial. He went to Messrs. Jenkinson and Sharpe's warehouse and found his old friend Bob Stansfield there, looking very pale and overworked. Aglionby carried him off with him to Scar Foot, and said he had better learn to be a farmer. He returned to Scar Foot in the middle of January, found Mrs. Bryce there, and greeted her with the words:

'Aunt, it is good to be at home again.'



CHAPTER IV.

DELPHINE.

WHEN Judith and her sister left Danesdale on the night after the ball, they drove home without exchanging a syllable. Judith was for once too absorbed in herself and her own concerns to notice her companion.

Delphine had folded her cloak around her, and crouched, as if exceeding weary, into one corner of the carriage. With her face turned towards the window, away from Judith, she remained motionless, voiceless, until at last they arrived at Yoresett House. It took a long time before Rhoda could be roused from

her sleep by the parlour fire, to let them in. At last she opened the door to them, and they went in, and paused in the great bare stone passage. Their candles stood there, and a lighted lamp.

'Well,' said Rhoda, yawning, and rubbing her eyes. 'What sort of a party was it?'

Delphine made no reply, but lighted her candle.

Rhoda was too sleepy to be very determined about receiving an answer to her question, and still stood rubbing her eyes and inarticulately murmuring that it must be very late.

'Good-night!' observed Delphine, with a shadow of her usual shadowy smile, and drawing her white cloak about her, her white figure flitted up the stairs.

Then first it was that Judith began to remark something unusual in Delphine's behaviour. She said nothing, but contented herself with telling Rhoda, who had summoned up animation enough again to inquire

what sort of a party it was, that it was very large, and very brilliant, and that she was too tired to say anything about it to-night—she would tell her to-morrow. Thereupon she put a candle into the sleepy maiden's hand, and with an indulgent smile bade her go. She would follow when she had looked round the house.

It came as something soothing, after the powerful agitation of the past hours, to go, candle in hand, through all the dark, cold passages, trying the doors, and seeing that all was locked up. Then she put out the lamp in the parlour, and took her way upstairs. She entered her own room, which, as has been said, opened into Delphine's, though they both had doors into the landing. The first thing that struck Judith was that this door between their rooms was shut. The shut door chilled her heart. She put her candle down, and stood still, listening. A silence as of the grave greeted her. Delphine could not, in less than ten minutes,

have taken off her finery, and got into bed, and gone to sleep—*ergo*, she must be sitting, or standing, or at any rate waking, conscious, living, in that room, behind that closed door.

Dread seized Judith's heart. They were accustomed to undress with the partition-door open, walking in and out of each other's rooms, chatting, or silent, as the case might be, but never debarred either from entering the other's chamber. And they always left the door open at last, and exchanged a good-night before going to sleep. What did this miserable, this unnatural closed door mean?'

'I wonder—I hope—surely it is not anything that Randulf Danesdale has said!' speculated Judith, in great uneasiness. She began to undress, but that closed door importuned her. Still not a sound from within. She began to question herself as to what she was to do. To get into bed and take no notice of Delphine was a sheer impossibility. When she had taken off her beautiful frock, and hung it up, and put on her dressing-gown,

and taken her hair-brush in her hand, she could bear it no longer. If any sound from within had reached her, she could have endured it, but the silence remained profound as ever. She put the brush down, stepped across the room, and knocked softly at the door. No reply.

Another knock, and 'Delphine!'

She had to knock again, and again to cry 'Delphine!' and then her sister's voice, calm and composed, said:

'Well?'

'May I not come in, and say good-night?'

A slight rustle. Then the door was opened—a very little, and Delphine stood on the other side, still fully dressed, and without letting Judith in, said 'Good-night,' and bent forward to kiss her.

'Del, what is this?' asked Judith, in great distress. 'What is the matter?'

'Nothing,' replied the same sweet, composed voice. 'I am a little tired. Let me alone.'

'Tired—well, let me come in and help you to take off your dress, and brush your hair, Del!'

There was an almost urgent appeal in her voice.

'No, thank you. I shall sit by my fire a little while, I dare say. You look tired. Go to bed. Good-night.'

She waited a moment, and then—closed the door again—gently, slowly, but most decidedly.

Judith retired, almost wild with vague alarm. Some great blow had befallen Delphine. She, who was now so well 'acquainted with grief' was quite sure of that. Who would have supposed that she would take this trouble so coldly and sternly; so entirely to herself as to shut out even her best beloved, her perfect friend and companion, from participation in it? She passed a sleepless night. She could not tell whether Delphine ever went to bed. She lay awake with her nerves strained, and her ear intent

to catch the faintest sound from her sister's room, and still none came. It was a cruel vigil. When it was quite late, though before the late daybreak had appeared, Judith dropped into an uneasy sleep, which presently grew more profound. Wearied out with grief, emotion, and fear, she slept soundly for a few hours, and when she awoke, the daylight made itself visible even through the down-drawn blind.

Feeling that it must be very late, and forgetting for a few blessed moments the ball, and everything connected with it, she sprang up, and began to dress. Very soon, of course, it all returned to her: the brief flash of hope and new life was over; grey reality, stony-hearted facts, the clouded future reasserted themselves, and it was with a heart as heavy as usual that she at last went downstairs.

In the parlour she found that which in nowise tended to reassure her, or brighten her spirits. The breakfast-things were still

on the table; Rhoda and Mrs. Conisbrough appeared to have finished. The latter was seated in her rocking-chair by the fire; the former was at the table, her elbows resting upon it. Both faces were turned towards Delphine, with an expression of pleased interest, who sat at the head of the table, with a face devoid of all trace of colour (but that might easily be fatigue), and looking the whiter in her black dress. She too was smiling: she was talking—she was entertaining her mother and sister with an account of last night's ball—of the company, the dresses. and the behaviour of those present; and her descriptions were flavoured with an ill-natured sarcasm very unusual to her. Just now she was describing Miss Vane, and her pink frock, and her manners and conduct in general, holding them up in a light of ridicule, which, could the object have been cognisant of it, must have caused her spasms of mortification.

When Judith came in, she was welcomed

also, as being the possible source of more interesting information; but very soon her mechanical, spiritless recitals and monosyllabic replies drew down Rhoda's indignation, and Judith, with a forced smile and a horrible pain at her heart, said she would not attempt to rival Delphine, for that she had not enjoyed the party and could not pretend to describe it in an amusing manner.

Two or three days passed, and things were still in the same miserable state. Delphine still wore the same blanched face, still continued to show the same spirit of raillery and indifference. When she was with her mother and sisters, it was always she who led the conversation, and was, as Rhoda gratefully informed her, the life and soul of the party.

'I wish you could go to a ball every week, Del,' she said fervently. 'It makes you quite delightful.'

To which Delphine replied with a little laugh, that monotony palled. Rhoda would soon be tired of hearing of balls, which must

all bear a strong family resemblance the one to the other. Occasionally Judith had found Delphine silent and alone, and then she realised how completely the other demeanour was a mask, put on to deceive and to cover some secret grief—secret indeed.

There are girls, and girls. Delphine surprised the person who knew her best by the manner in which she took her grief. Whatever it was, she kept it to herself. She had taken it in her arms, as it were, and made a companion of it, of whom she was very jealous. She kept it for her own delectation alone. No one else was suffered even to lift a corner of the thick veil which shrouded it. No one knew what it said to her, or she to it, in the long night-watches, in the silent vigils of darkness, or alone in the daylight hours; nay, so fondly did she guard it, that none in that house, except Judith, even suspected its existence. Though her mother noted her white face, she was completely deceived by her composed and cheerful demeanour, and

said that when the weather was warmer, Delphine would be stronger. It was Judith alone who instinctively felt that never had her sister been stronger, never so strong, as now, when she looked so white and wan. But she also felt it was that terrible kind of strength which feeds upon the spirit which supplies it: when that is exhausted, body and soul seem to break down together in an utter collapse, and this was what the elder girl feared for the younger; this was why she longed irrepressibly that Delphine would only speak to her—confess her wretchedness—impart the extent and nature of her grief.





CHAPTER V.

'FOR MY SON'S SAKE.'

THE ball had taken place on a Thursday — New Year's Eve. The days dragged on at Yoresett House, in the manner described, until the following Monday. On that afternoon, a dark and cloudy one, the quietness of the village street was broken. Sir Gabriel Danesdale, his groom behind him, rode up to the door. Sir Gabriel inquired if the ladies were at home; he was told that they were, and he dismounted and went in, leaving his horse to be walked about by his groom, to the great wonderment of the watching population.

He was ushered into the parlour, where Judith and her mother sat. Mrs. Conisbrough was fluttered. Only once or twice, since her widowhood, had Sir Gabriel ever entered her house. He had glanced about him as he passed through the hall—he had seen the bareness and the chillness of everything, and his heart was filled with pity and with some self-reproach. Marion Arkendale, with her dark eyes and her light foot, had been so bonny; 'the Flower of Danesdale' had been her name. He did not know how it was that she had fallen out of the society of the place, had disappeared from the friendly circles, gradually, but surely.

'Poverty, poverty!' he thought to himself. 'It is a shame that she should have been neglected because of her poverty. And it was a rascally trick on old John's part, though he was my friend, to leave her as he did.' Filled with these reflections, he spoke cordially, and almost eagerly, holding out his hand:

'Mrs. Conisbrough, I am more of a stranger in your house than I should be, considering what old friends and neighbours we are. Will you forgive my negligence, and believe that it arises out of anything rather than ill-will?'

'Ah, Sir Gabriel, I never suspected you of ill-will,' she said, flushing. 'And when women are alone in the world their circle must be smaller than when there are men in the family. Pray sit down. I am glad to see you under my roof.'

'It gave me hearty pleasure to see your daughters amongst us on Thursday,' he continued. 'Perhaps, as you say your circle is so small, you don't know what a sensation they made. Half the fellows who were there have been talking about them ever since.'

Mrs. Conisbrough smiled, gratified.

'You are very good. My girls have had no outside advantages. They have none, indeed, except their youth and the fact that they are ladies by birth, and, I hope, by breeding.

And that tells, Sir Gabriel—even in these days, it tells.'

'My dear madam, it is everything,' said he, earnestly. 'I quite agree with you. We'll have a chat about that a little later; and meantime, I want to know if I may see your daughter Delphine, alone, for a short time. I have something that I wish to say to her.'

Mrs. Conisbrough started, paused, then replied:

'Certainly you can see her. Judith, Delphine is in the other room. Suppose you take Sir Gabriel to her there.'

Judith rose and went across the passage, while Sir Gabriel, bowing over Mrs. Conisbrough's hand, wished her good-afternoon, and left her without explaining his errand. He followed Judith, who was in the room on the opposite side of the hall. Turning as she saw him come, she remarked:

'Ah, here is Sir Gabriel, Delphine.'

Then she left them alone, and closed the door after her.

Sir Gabriel found himself standing before a pale, composed-looking young lady, whose hand rested lightly on the mantelpiece, and whose beauty and grace struck him even more in the dull light of this January afternoon, than they had done in her radiant ball-dress beneath the lamplight on New Year's Eve. Perfectly calm, she turned her large luminous eyes, with their golden reflections, upon him as he entered, and a scarcely perceptible sigh left her lips.

Dark rings encircled those lovely eyes. Though the delicate white brow was smooth there was a shadow upon it, indefinable, but most palpable. Sir Gabriel remembered how Randulf had said she looked, and he felt that the lad had been right. This calm and stillness was not that of repose, but the pallid quietude which follows a mortal blow. She attempted a faint little smile as he came in, which flickered for a moment about her mouth, and then died away again, as if abashed. Sir Gabriel whose bosom had been filled with

very mingled feelings as he rode hither from Danesdale, no longer felt doubtful as to what emotion predominated. It was a great compassion that he experienced; a strong man's generous desire to take to his sufficing protection some weak, and sad, and grieved creature; to comfort it, to bid it sorrow no more.

Sir Gabriel contemplated the beautiful forlorn figure, and his heart swelled almost to bursting. Those eyes might well haunt Randulf. Of course he could not put his arm round her waist, and say, 'My poor child, tell me what ails you, and let me lift this trouble from your shoulders,' as he would have liked to do. Custom did not permit such a thing, but he took her hand kindly, and looked kindly from his genial, yet commanding eyes into her white face, while he said, kindly too:

'My dear, I have ridden over from Danesdale, to have a little chat with you.'

'Yes; will you sit down?' said Delphine.

'Yes, if you will take this chair beside me, and listen to me. I will not delay in telling you my errand. My boy Randulf tells me that he has fallen very much in love with you, at which fact I certainly cannot pretend to be surprised. Nay, it is surely not a matter about which to be alarmed!' he added, seeing the agitation on her face, which she could not repress. 'Let me tell you that I know all that has passed between you and Randulf. He told me. He forgot himself the other night—in a very pardonable manner—but he did forget himself, it is quite certain. A man in his position has no business to propose to any lady without consulting his father. From what he told me, I am sure you were sensible of that—were you not? Did you not feel scruples on that point?'

'Yes—that is, I should have done, if——'

'I thought so,' said Sir Gabriel, hearing only that which he wished to hear. 'I told him so. I said I honoured you for those scruples. I thought the matter over very

seriously—you will not wonder at that. The marriage of a man's only son is no trivial matter to him. I came to the conclusion that my son's happiness is bound up in this matter —that it stands or falls with it——'

'No, no!' interrupted Delphine, in a quick, gasping voice.

'Yes, my dear child, it does. He loves you with no passing passion. It has made him into a man all at once. I say, his happiness stands or falls with it; and I venture to hope that you feel the same with respect to yourself.'

Silence was the only answer.

Sir Gabriel's face lost none of its kindness, but a troubled expression crept over it, and into his eyes, as he saw the fixed and marble composure of the lovely face before him.

'You do not speak,' he said at last. 'Let me explain as clearly as I can the errand which brought me here. I have come to ask you to reconsider the answer you gave to Randulf the other night. Put away any

thoughts of me—ask only of your own heart if it contains that love for my son which a wife should bear to her husband, and if it answers you yes, give me leave to send Randulf to see you; let him hear from you that you will become his wife, and my daughter.'

Delphine's face had only grown paler. Her hand, which had been resting nervelessly on the table, had slipped down, and was now fast locked together with the other. She clasped them tightly upon her lap, looking at him with the same dull, glazed eyes, the same impassive calm, and speaking at last in a toneless, mechanical voice, which seemed not to belong to herself.

'I am very sorry. You are very good to me, but I cannot marry your son.'

Sir Gabriel was shocked, distressed in the extreme. This was no refusal from one who was indifferent. Could it possibly be that the girl was not quite in her right mind? But that idea was soon cast aside. Nothing

could be less agitated, more reasonable, more sane than her whole manner. He did not know that she was suffering supreme torture; that she felt as if every moment she must shriek aloud in her despair, or burst into a fit of wild, hysterical laughter at the grim humour of the game of cross-purposes which they were playing. This he could not know; but he would have been a fool if he had not read suffering in her blanched face, in her dull and fixed eyes, in her nervously-clasped hands, and in the dead monotone of her voice. He could only grope about, pleading Randulf's cause, which had now become his own; with each word stabbing her afresh, thinking that if only he could get her to assign the reason for her refusal of Randulf, he would be able to overcome it.

'You told Randulf that you did not love him,' he went on. 'He told me that he did not believe you.' A rush of colour surged over her face, and Sir Gabriel went on gently, but pushing matters as far as he

could, to make things straight, as he thought: 'As to that I can affirm nothing, except that he spoke from the most reverent and solemn conviction, and not as a coxcomb. And you will forgive my saying that there could surely be nothing very remarkable in it—certainly nothing to be ashamed of, if you did love him, however ardently. I am his father, and consequently prejudiced in his favour, but I ought to know better than others what he has been to me. He has been a good son, of whom I am as proud as I am fond. I think his sister would own that he is a good brother.' (One of Delphine's hands went up to her face, and half hid it.) 'His friends, I notice, continue to be his friends. His dependents are fond of him; they serve him cheerfully. His dogs and horses love him too, and that is something to go by. He is no fool; he is a gentleman by nature as well as by birth.' (Delphine's other hand had now gone to her face, which was covered completely.) 'And there is no

reason why he should not be as worthy as a lover and husband as he is in these other things. And added to that, my child, he loves you neither lightly nor carelessly, but with a love I like to see—with reverence as well as passion, with a man's love, and the love of a good and honourable man. Is it really impossible that you can return his love? Surely you cannot refuse to allow him to plead his cause! Surely——'

He stopped abruptly, moved, himself, as he dwelt upon the excellences of that 'boy' who was so dear to him, and to secure whose happiness he had undertaken this errand. For the last few minutes Delphine's arms had been stretched out upon the table, her golden head prone upon them, her face hidden from sight. Now she suddenly raised it to him—tearless still, but with her eyes dim with anguish, and faltered brokenly:

'Oh, Sir Gabriel, have a little pity upon me! Do you think I do not know what he is!' The words came with something like

indignation, anger, scorn. 'Have I not got eyes, and ears, and a *heart?* Oh, if it could only turn to stone this moment! And has he not looked at me, and spoken to me, and told me he loved me? Has he not been kind, and gentle, and generous? Has he not . . . . I *worship* him!'

The last words sprang forth, as it were, involuntarily, breathlessly. She looked at him for a moment with flashing eyes, her face transfigured with a beauty which startled him; her passionate fervour reduced him to silence. That Randulf loved her he wondered no longer. He approved from his heart of hearts.

'*Therefore* I will never marry him,' she went on, and her voice had gained strength. 'Tell him what you please; that I am a flirt and a jilt—only he will never believe it; but tell him I will never marry him. And if you knew why,' she added, composedly, 'you would not press me either.'

'I do not know that,' he said. 'I see

you are oppressed by what seems to you some very painful secret. But you know nothing of the world, my child. I must be a far better judge than you of what does and what does not constitute an insuperable obstacle. Cannot you confide in me?'

'No, never, never! I know nothing of the world, as you say; but I know the difference between honour and dishonour. It is for your sake, and his—not mine. Do I look as if I were enjoying it? Do I look happy? I know what I am doing. Believe that, and in pity's name leave me to my misery.'

He felt that there was no further appeal. He could not be angry with her. He could not resent, though he had spoken quite advisedly when he said that with her answer Randulf's happiness must stand or fall. It would have to fall, but, somehow, the large-hearted old man could think at present only of this stricken girl—for he saw she was stricken—not of his own nearest and dearest.

'Then, my child, I must even leave you, though I feel my heart broken to have my errand end so badly. Good-bye, my love! I would fain have gone home feeling I had gained another child. I would gladly see my son married to a wife like you, if it could have been!'

Sir Gabriel's lips were quivering, as he took her hand, stooped, and gently kissed her forehead. She did not speak, she uttered not a syllable, but sat beside the table still, white as ever, with her hand drooping beside her. At the door, he turned back once again, and came to her, saying:

'Remember, you can never be indifferent to me. If ever I can serve you, let me know how, and it shall be done.'

Then he went away, really, and she never moved. She heard the front door open, the horses' hoofs. Then they rode away, and she was alone, the fire, burning low, the early January evening closing in, dank and drear.

To her poignant anguish a great apathy had succeeded. She had spoken out her whole soul and life as she told Sir Gabriel, 'I *worship* him!' The whole scene seemed to float away into the background, like some far-back, half-remembered dream. Everything was shadowy and unreal.

Still she sat alone, and her forehead never changed from its white, stony composure, though it was almost dark, and it was a long time since Sir Gabriel had gone. She did not know that. She scarcely heard the door softly open and close, but she was conscious by-and-by that some one knelt down beside her—it was Judith, who had taken her drooping hand, and was speaking to her, in her deep, vibrating tones:

'Delphine, forgive me, but I cannot bear it any longer. What have I done that you should repel me thus? If your heart breaks, let mine break with it. I ask nothing else. Let us be together, even if it is only in our wretchedness!'

The appeal came at the right moment. Earlier, it would have irritated. Later, it would have been useless. Just now, with her great renunciation just consummated, it was salvation ; it enabled her to speak.

'Judith—you are all I have left.'

'And you to me. I have lived with you these two hours, and suffered with you. Sir Gabriel is a kind old man, Delphine.'

'Poor old man! Yes, very. He likes to see people happy. He wants me to be happy —he wants Randulf to be happy. The other night Randulf asked me to marry him, and I said no. To-day Sir Gabriel came and asked me to marry Randulf; and told me all about how good he was, and how good it would be —oh, Judith! how good it would be to be his wife!'

Her head fell upon her sister's neck. Judith knew better than to speak. There was a long silence, during which one suffered perhaps as keenly as the other.

'I said no,' Delphine resumed, at last.

'The worst is over now. I must try to go on as if it had not happened—only, Judith, you must promise me one thing.'

'Anything that it is in my power to do, my child.'

'Try to keep mamma from talking of it. I fear she will be angry, and I cannot bear it. To wrangle over it, would be like wrangling over the dead body of the person who was dearest to you.'

Judith's brow darkened. There were moments when her large, grave beauty took an expression of kindling anger, and she was not one whose anger is as a summer cloud: it was not an anger to be smiled at.

'I have seen to that,' she said. 'There are limits to childish obedience. For your sake, Delphine, I have done what I never thought to do. My mother was angry. Sir Gabriel just came in and spoke to her. He said it was due to her to say that you had refused Mr. Danesdale, and that he could not oppose your decision. When he was gone,

she wanted to know why. She said she must understand what you meant. I could bear it no longer. I spoke: I told her why.'

'You told her? But that is fearful!' said Delphine, in an awestruck whisper.

'It is fearful. But there was no alternative. I did not openly name the reason; I said it was for the same reason as that for which Uncle Aglionby had left his money to his grandson. She looked at me in a manner I shall never forget. It was I who felt the criminal; but you will not be tormented. . . . As for me, I shall soon go away from here. It is not fitting that she and I should be in the same house together, for she will not forgive me. She will forgive you, Delphine. Come and speak to her.'

Delphine complied, without hesitation. It was Judith's turn to be left by herself—the strongest, and therefore the loneliest spirit under that roof.



CHAPTER VI.

MARAH.

A SAD afternoon at the end of January. The scene was Mrs. Malleson's pleasant drawing-room at Stanniforth Rectory. Stanniforth was an exceeding large and desolate parish; it comprised Yoresett, and Scar Foot, and Danesdale, and many other offshoots and dependencies. Sparse was the population, though the extent was great, for, in the words of the old chronicler, 'Litle corne groweth in Suadale;' and of Danesdale he says, 'Danesdale, and the soile abowt is very hilly, and berith litle corne; but noriseth many bestes;' a description true to this day, to the very letter.

The house belonging to the old 'paroch chirche for alle the aforesaid townes,' was a large, pleasant, modern mansion. Mrs. Malleson's drawing-room faced south, looking across a flower-garden, over some roughly-wooded 'common land,' to rugged grey fells. At this season of the year, the sun set almost exactly opposite the windows of this room. He had been struggling all day to make a way through the clouds, without much success. Just now, however, he had riven the clouds asunder, and was casting an almost lurid glow of farewell splendour; of misty rays like a crown over the rugged ridges of the fells. Indoors, it was not too light. The fire shone on the furniture, and on the keys of the open piano. The two occupants of the room were Mrs. Malleson and Judith Conisbrough, and they had been drinking four o'clock tea. Judith, who had taken off her hat and mantle, sat in the oriel window, in a low, chintz-covered chair. Her face was turned towards the sunset above the everlasting hills; and

the departing rays caught it, and lit it up with a kind of halo, throwing out into full relief the strong, yet delicate features of her noble face, and showing forth more than usual, both its sadness and its beauty.

Mrs. Malleson, a little bright brunette, with quick, bird-like, graceful movements, looked, beside her visitor, like a robin beside some far-seeing royal bird. She sat beh nd her tea-table, and laid down the work which her ever-busy fingers had for a long time been plying—for she was an industrious little lady.

'I wish I could have an exact likeness of you as you sit now, Judith, with the sun shining upon your face. The picture would do beautifully for a painted window, if a ring were put round your head, and it was called St. Cecilia, or St. Theresa, or St. Elizabeth, or some of these grand women, you know.'

'Very different from the reality, who is neither grand nor a saint, but who wishes

very much that your husband would come in, dear Paulina.'

'I cannot imagine what detains him, I am sure. He knew you were coming, because he made a special note of it, and he has taken such a deep interest in all this affair of yours. But he cannot be long now.'

'And he would not tell you what he had found for me?' said Judith, and Mrs. Malleson repeated, not for the first time that afternoon:

'No, dear. It was about a week ago that he suddenly said, at breakfast-time, "I have it, I believe, at last." And then I said, "What have you, Laurence?" he answered, "Some work that will suit Miss Conisbrough." Not another word would he say to me; but when I asked him if it was anything to do with nursing, he answered mysteriously, "Perhaps—perhaps not." And that is all I know, except that yesterday he told me to write to you, and ask if you would call here, as he was so busy, and didn't wish you to be delayed.'

'I *wonder* what it is!' said Judith, resting her chin upon her hand, and still gazing out towards the hills and the setting sun.

'I hope it will be something you will not mind taking,' said Mrs. Malleson, seriously. 'Laurence is such a very matter-of-fact man, you know. He would be quite capable of thinking that when you said you would take *anything*, you meant it.'

'Of course I meant it. I believe there is not any kind of honest work with head or hands that I would not gladly take, to get away from Yoresett.'

'Well, let us hope—there he is!' said Mrs. Malleson, as she heard the loud latch of the vestibule door lift and fall. 'And some one with him. Excuse me, Judith. I'll send him to you here, and tell him to make short work with his business, or he'll have to walk home with you.'

She skimmed out of the room, closing the door after her. Judith, again lost in the absorbing speculation, 'What can it be?'

fixed her eyes upon the now grey and deathly looking sky, over which night was fast casting its mantle, nor noticed any outside sounds, until Mr. Malleson's voice roused her.

The Reverend Laurence Malleson was a favourable specimen of a broad-church clergyman of the Church of England, on the Charles Kingsley lines.

He was some thirty-three or thirty-five years of age, and was dressed in a manner which would not have betrayed to anyone his priestly vocation.

'Miss Conisbrough, I fear I have kept you waiting an unconscionable time,' he began; 'and I am very sorry for it. I can only say that I really could not help it, and trust to your good-nature to excuse me.'

'Pray do not mention it, Mr. Malleson. I do not mind waiting if, as Mrs. Malleson leads me to hope, you have a little work waiting for *me*, at the end of the time.'

'I was much puzzled by the circumstances

of your case, I confess,' he said. 'I agreed with my wife, that it was not everything that would do for you. I could soon have found you *something*. I could have got you a situation as nursery governess, to take entire charge of three children, and teach them music, French, drawing, and English, at the handsome stipend of twenty-five pounds a year. Would you have taken that?'

'If there had been *nothing* else—yes. But I would rather have to do with grown-up people than with children.'

'You spoke of nursing. Of course I could have recommended you to different institutions. But there was your "lack of gold!"' (Mr. Malleson spoke plainly, but with as keen an interest as if it were his own case he was describing and providing for, and Judith was far too much in earnest to care if he had been twice as explicit.)

'The most agreeable places as nurses,' he went on, 'are those where you go as what

they call a "lady probationer;" paying about a guinea a week for board, lodging, and practical instruction, until the medical board consider you qualified to take a nurse's place. But you had told me that you must go somewhere where you could earn, not pay money; where services, not a premium, were required.'

'Yes.'

'One morning I bethought myself quite suddenly of Dr. Hugh Wentworth of Irkford. Did you ever hear of him?'

'No.'

'He has a name, nevertheless. He is an old friend of mine. We were schoolfellows. He is a comparatively young man—about my age, in fact; but he has taken every degree that the medical profession has to give, and is member of I don't know how many scientific societies with long names. He is president of the Irkford Royal Infirmary, and his private practice might be of any extent he chooses. We used to be great

friends, as lads. Lately, we have lost sight of one another. I knew him to be influential, and I believed him to be rarely good and wise; a man in a thousand. Well, I wrote to him; recalled myself to his memory, and asked him if he cared to do me a favour, as I thought he could. Promptly I had a reply. He remembered all about it, and was glad to hear of me again; and any favour that lay in his power, he would do me. I then wrote to him again. I told him about you. I gave him my impressions as to your character and capabilities. I told him that what you wanted was *work*—that you were desirous to learn anything that you were set to do, and that whatever it might be, you were resolved to master it. I mentioned nursing, and said that your thoughts had turned towards it, not sentimentally——'

'Ah, I am glad you said that.'

'But as a career—as a practical calling, In short, I begged him, if he had any opening for a learner, and was likely to hear of

any, to remember me and you. And he has done so.'

Mr. Malleson smiled pleasantly, not adding that he had spoken of Judith to his friend in terms of praise, such as those who knew him as Dr. Wentworth did were well aware he rarely used; that he had wound up his description of her by saying:

'In short, she is one of those women who would fulfil old George Herbert's words—who would sweep a room, if she had it to sweep, to the glory of her God.'

'He has done so? Oh, Mr. Malleson, what goodness, on both his part and yours And what does he say?'

'He says'— the rector drew a letter from his pocket—'he says, "The young lady you speak of, Miss Judith Conisbrough, appears to be a—h'm—h'm—character who might be useful, if her energies were properly directed. Of course I know, as every medical man of large practice must, that hundreds, if not thousands of young women annually die,

or go mad, or sink into hopeless querulousness or hysteric invalidism, simply because they have nothing to do in the world. Miss Conisbrough can come to Irkford if she chooses. I can find some work for her, but I beg you will explain to her that it is neither light, nor agreeable, nor well-paid. No nurse's work is agreeable. It is seldom well-paid. She will find the start, especially, most unpleasant. It would not be nursing, as I have no room at present for either a nurse or probationer. By-and-by there will be a vacancy. What I can give her is this. In the Nurses' Home, in which my wife and I take a great interest, there is a matron who wants an assistant, The assistant's duties would be chiefly of a domestic character at first, and pray do not delude Miss Conisbrough with the idea that they would be in any way different from what domestic offices usually are. She would have various departments to look after—from the kitchen to the receiving of visitors if necessary, or if

the matron were otherwise engaged. She can try it, if she likes. It will give her a thorough practical acquaintance with the arrangements of the house in which, should she ever become a nurse or a probationer, she would have to live. For her services in this capacity she would receive eighteen pounds a year. When an opening occurs, I will, if her conduct and capabilities have been satisfactory, give her the refusal of a probationer's place. I have had many applications for the place, but none which I consider quite suitable. I am inclined to think that your friend would do, since from what you say, I gather that she is country born and bred ; that in tastes she is simple and frugal ; is physically strong and healthy, and in mind steadfast. Pray do not forget to impress upon her that the work is neither light nor agreeable ; or it may be that after five minutes' conversation with her, I may simply have to tell her to go home again. As soon as she decides, let me know. She may come as soon as she pleases ; she

must come within the next ten days if she decides to come at all.' "

'Now what do you say?' asked Mr. Malleson. 'It is eighteen pounds a year, and work that is evidently neither delicate nor agreeable. The other is five-and-twenty pounds, and much less arduous work——'

'Oh, I will take the Irkford one, please. The work cannot be too arduous for me. Oh, Mr. Malleson, if you only knew what this is to me!'

It was with great difficulty that she refrained from bursting into tears of relief and joy. The tight strain at her heart seemed loosened. The awful tension—the blank unvaried hopelessness of her present and future had changed.

'I am glad if it does please you. But you will forgive my saying—you must allow me, since I am your clergyman, and you are without father or brother—to say that it behoves you to think seriously and long before you take such a step—before you, a lady born and

bred, leave your quiet home in this beautiful and healthy spot, to venture out into a great city, where you will have onerous work, which will have to be carried on in the vitiated air of the same city. Remember, you renounce your freedom, your independence; you bind yourself to absolute servitude, absolute obedience, and——'

'Yes, Mr. Malleson; I have reflected upon all those points. I can only say, that you do not know all the motives which prompt me to take this course. You and Mrs. Malleson have known me for some years now; have I ever behaved in a giddy, or unseemly, or irrational manner, during that time?'

'Never, to my knowledge.'

'And I am not doing so now. I have made no light decision. I came to it on my knees — through fasting and prayer — not from carelessness or love of variety.'

'I will say no more. I trust you fully, and fully appreciate the earnestness of your purpose. It only grieves me to think that one

at your age, and in your position, should feel it necessary to come to so stern and sad a decision.'

'You are very kind. I have pitied myself often, in former times, but not now.'

'I hope you have not been without consolation. It is often in such trials that the purest and truest consolation is given; indeed it is doubtful whether those who have not had hard and bitter trials, *can* know what inward peace means. There was a royal lady you know, once, whose crown was a crown of sorrows almost from the first day she wore it, and *she* said constantly:

'Who ne'er his bread with tears hath ate,
Who ne'er the night's drear watches through
Weeping beside his bed hath sate,
Ye heavenly powers, he knows not *you*.'

'I know,' said Judith. 'But Queen Louise was a braver and a better woman than I am; and in all her sorrows she had work to do. I have sorrowed as she did. I have eaten my bread with tears, and wept on my bed the

whole night long; but I have not found much consolation yet. This work, I trust, will help to bring it.'

She rose, as did Mr. Malleson.

'You will not go without telling us—you will see my wife and me again before you leave?'

'Surely; and I will say good-night to Paulina now. I must take my way home.

Mr. Malleson preceded her across the passage, threw open the door of a lighted room (for all the sunset had long been over, and darkness had descended); and Judith, entering and screening her eyes from the sudden glare, found herself face to face with her friend Mrs. Malleson, and with Bernard Aglionby, who had risen as she, Judith, came in, and who now stood looking at her.





CHAPTER VII.

LOVE AND WAR.

'OH, you are still here!' observed the clergyman to Aglionby. 'Won't you stay and have some dinner with us, as it has got so late?'

'No, thank you,' replied he, shaking hands with Judith, though neither he nor she spoke. 'I heard from Mrs. Malleson that Miss Conisbrough was here, and would be walking home, so I sent my horse on to Yoresett, and remained here to escort her, if she will allow me to do so.'

'Oh! I think there is no need,' began Judith.

'My dear, there is!' said Mrs. Malleson, decidedly; 'and, to please me, you will accept Mr. Aglionby's escort. Indeed, I will not invite him to dinner; and as he will be obliged to walk to Yoresett, that settles the question.'

'Yes, I think it does,' said Judith, rather gravely. 'I am only sorry that Mr. Aglionby should have put himself to such inconvenience.'

To this Aglionby made no reply. He had not spoken to her at all. They had all moved towards the hall.

'Are you well wrapped up for the walk, Judith? Won't you have an extra shawl?' asked her friend.

'No, thank you. I walk quickly. Good-night, Paulina. Your husband will tell you all about it. And good-night, Mr. Malleson. *I thank you,*' she said, with emphasis, looking earnestly into his face. 'You know what that means, with me.'

Husband and wife accompanied them to

the hall, opened the door for them, and they stepped out into the mirk.

'Bitter chill it was.'

The door—that hospitable door—was closed after them. It had been thawing during the day, but was now freezing hard. The sky had cleared, and the stars were appearing. Judith's heart was beating fast. However calm and uneventful her outside life might have been, her inner one had been filled with deep and varied emotions. The interview she had just concluded had been to her a solemn one; it had stirred her spirit to its depths. She had expected a long walk home alone in the dark, and had promised herself that in its course she would reflect upon all that had passed; would smooth out the tangled web of conflicting feelings, and plan how best to break her decision to those at home. She felt that she needed this interval: needed this spell of quiet meditation. Now, behold, it was denied her. She was not to be

alone. Another was to be her companion: one from whom in spirit she indeed never strayed far, but of whom the shadowy spiritual presence was, compared with the actual bodily one, exactly 'as moonlight is to sunlight, and as water is to wine.' How could she think, how ponder, how become at one with herself, with Bernard Aglionby at her side? She gave it up at once, thinking, with a kind of moral recklessness which of late had been a frequent visitant with her:

'What does it matter? Soon it will *all* be at an end. What difference can one pang more make—one other straw? Let him come! I shall get through it somehow.'

But as they paced silently down the rectory drive, she began to realise that she had never really conquered him, never induced him to submit to her behests except in so far as words—promises—went. He was like the young man of the parable, who said, 'I go, sir,' but went not. This was the second time he had disobeyed the spirit, if not the letter,

of what she required of him. She knew that it was not done innocently or unconsciously. She knew that he was quite aware of his disobedience, and that he did it deliberately and advisedly. It was very wrong of him, with Lizzie Vane in the background on his side, and with, on her side, far worse things than a Lizzie Vane, and things which *must* not be nearly approached. Very wrong; she could in nowise palliate or approve of it; she felt that she ought to rebuke it, and even while conning over in her mind the best way in which to begin the rebuke, she was conscious of a wild, unlicensed pleasure, on her own part, at the occurrence.

'There is no moon, is there?' were the words which roused her when they had proceeded for some little distance along the road to Yoresett.'

'No; but it is clear, and the stars are bright. Otherwise, this is a dark, lonely road.'

'It is,' he answered, with considerable

emphasis. 'It is no road on which for you to be alone at such an hour. I could scarcely believe Mrs. Malleson when she told me you had got to walk home, and that without an escort.'

'That shows plainly that you have a great deal yet to learn about country habits.'

'I hope so, if that is one of them; but——'

'Are you going this way?' said Judith, pausing as he made for a narrow lane on the right. 'If we go this way we have to cross the river, and there is no bridge, you know, only the stepping-stones.'

'Well, are you afraid? I thought you were boasting of your country habits. It is starlight; it is not *quite* the end of daylight yet. "Th' hipping stanes," as they call them here, are solid, high, and dry; and my hand is a firm one, I assure you.'

Judith said nothing, but followed him down the lane into a road which ran through the bottom of the valley, beside the river for some

little distance, till, where it was broad and shallow, a long line of stepping-stones led across it to the other side. It was a weird-looking spot, hardly tempting to one not used to such roads and such 'short-cuts.' Just below the stepping-stones, too, was a ford, and a dangerous ford, since to deviate but a few feet from its course meant—and had proved—certain death to horse and man, by reason of a horrible deep hole shelving suddenly down, deep enough to bury completely, as it had done more than once, horse, driver, and vehicle. Between the 'hipping-stanes' towards this grisly trap the water rushed gurgling along; the bed of the river was too shallow and broken, the motion too incessant, for the water to freeze. Judith paused as they stood by the first stepping-stone, while, after one or two of the others, the remainder faded and vanished, and the opposite bank of the stream was not discernible.

'It looks—I never crossed them at such an hour, or when it was so dark——' she began.

'Are you afraid to trust yourself on them—with me? Do you imagine that I should not share any accident which might befal you?'

He offered her his hand, and again struck dumb, as it were, Judith put hers in it, and allowed him to lead her whither he would. The crossing of the stepping-stones was a slow one, but it was accomplished in safety and in silence. They traversed, silently also, the little lane at the other side, which led them to the high-road to Yoresett, and when they were once more there, and slowly walking through a little dark wood on either side the wall, Aglionby began, slowly:

'Mrs. Malleson tells me that you think of leaving Yoresett.'

'Yes. That is, I have wished to leave Yoresett for a long time. Now I have quite decided to do so, because Mr. Malleson has been kind enough to use his interest with a friend to get me something to do.'

'Ah! I do not know that such things

always *are* kind. Mrs. Malleson said she was jealous of you,' he added, with a forced laugh, 'for that you and her husband had secrets.'

'In other words, you asked her where I was going, and what I was going to do, and she could not tell you.'

'Quite true, though you put it in as disagreeable a manner as you can. You consider my natural interest in your movements to be impertinent.'

'I never said so. I only know that, considering what it was that Mr. Malleson had to say to me, he did perfectly right not to speak of it to anyone until he had seen me.'

'Forgive me; but is it allowable to ask what the work is which is to take you away from Yoresett—a fact which appears to cause you much rejoicing?'

'Oh, quite. I have no wish now to make any secret of it. I was too happy when Mr. Malleson told me of it.'

'Is it something so delightful? You cer-

tainly try my patience to the utmost; but perhaps my assurance in asking merits some such punishment.'

'Not at all. I am going to live at Irkford.'

'At Irkford!' First there was a ring of astonishment, then one of irrepressible pleasure, in his tones. 'So am I.'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'But may I not know what you are going to do at Irkford?'

She told him, briefly enough, and concluded:

'So you see, I shall begin at the beginning, and who knows where I shall end? I am vain enough to fancy that some time I may rise quite high—to the position of matron, or lady-superintendent—who knows?'

He had let her give her account of her future life and duties without uttering a word of interruption. He had heard her out, even to the utterance of the ambitious dream of the last sentence, and then he said, quite composedly:

'I am surprised at Mr. Malleson proposing such a monstrous thing to you, even in a jest. I fancied he had more sense. He must have known how utterly impossible it was for you to accept it. Really, it was almost insulting to you. But I suppose he was trying you.'

'You are strangely mistaken. I have Dr. Wentworth's address in my purse, and shall write to him to-night, and propose to go to him in a week from now.'

'You are jesting,' he said; and still he spoke composedly, though not so quietly as at first.

'I never was in more solemn and steadfast earnest in my life.'

Another pause.

They walked on side by side, and Judith imagined that he had dismissed the subject from his mind, as not concerning him—as a wilful woman's whim. Suddenly she was startled by hearing him say, in a voice which she hardly recognised :

'You must not: you shall not! I will not have it!'

His voice quivered uncontrollably. Judith caught her breath: her heart gave a great bound: at the same instant conscience cried, loudly and imperatively:

'That is wrong! stop it at once!'

'You must be dreaming, Mr. Aglionby, to speak to me in such a manner,' she said, coldly.

And that was all that resolution could at first summon to the assistance of conscience. When the head is sick, and the limbs fail, it is hard to march onwards with unchanged front.

'Dreaming, am I?' he said, with a short, angry laugh. 'I wish to heaven I could think I was!'

They were passing a small lonely farm by the wayside. A bright light shone from one of the windows. He stopped abruptly, and Judith stopped too, as if she had been part of himself.

'Look at me!' he bade her, in a voice choked with anger and sorrow. 'Look at me, and tell me again, *if you can*, that you intend to do this thing.'

'Assuredly, I am resolved to do it,' she answered, raising her eyes to his face, and speaking steadily, coldly, decidedly.

She could, however, scarce endure to encounter the glance she met; it was so wrathful, and withal so wobegone — nor to contemplate his countenance, so pale was it, so transfigured.

'I intend it!' she repeated, averting her eyes, and speaking with desperate haste. 'And more than that, I look forward to it as my salvation, as to a deliverer from a life which I loathe, and from a burden which has grown greater than I can bear.'

'*It must not be!*' said he, in a passionate whisper. 'Judith, it must not be. You must give this up—indeed you must.'

'I quite fail to see why . . . and indeed, I beg you will not enter into your reasons,'

she added hastily, seeing he was about to speak. 'My mind is made up, and *you* can have no possible right to meddle in the matter.'

She spoke ever more decidedly, but thrilled as she remembered that once or twice already she had made up her mind, without Aglionby's having been much affected by that fact.

'You have treated me hardly from the very first,' he said, and they were still standing in the road, speaking in low, vehement tones. 'You have exacted from me submission in things where most men would have refused to yield it. You have forbidden me to enter your house, to be on friendly terms with you, to do the barest justice to your mother, or your sisters, or yourself. Justice! You refuse to allow me to attempt even any palliation of the manner in which they have been treated. You have already extracted from my inheritance every grain of pleasure which it would have given me, and now, to crown all, you turn upon me, and

coolly inform me that you—*you*, to save whom from a moment's uneasiness I would give all that I am worth——'

'You have no right to say that to *me*,' said Judith, proudly.

'My wrongs give me a right to say that—and more than that. To crown all, I say, you inform me that you are going to undertake a task which would make a strong man recoil—to be a servant amongst servants, until this doctor, who might be a pope in whom you placed implicit reliance, sees fit in his good pleasure to order you to go to a hospital, and immolate yourself within its walls, amongst horrors of every kind—amongst loathsome wounds, small-pox, fever, perhaps. If they order you to go and nurse a man down with black typhus, you must do it—can you deny it?'

'Deny it—no! Why should I?'

'All this, and all sorts of nameless horrors besides. Any day you may take some horrible disease and die of it. God! it

makes my brain reel, only to imagine it! I wish I could have choked Malleson before he ever wrote his disgraceful letter to this cursed doctor!'

Judith had moved on, too agitated, too overpowered and excited to stand still. She had forgotten by now that it was wrong in him to address her thus. She felt only the strong, overpowering joy of finding herself first and foremost in his heart—indubitably, undeniably first.

'And you expect me still tamely to submit to such a proceeding?' he continued, vehemently. 'What do you take me for? A spaniel? A calf? A fool? *You* in such a condition: a woman like you! You must be mad—mad, perfectly mad! And Malleson——'

He stopped.

She was hurrying onward, her hands clasped, her head bent, her heart beating tumultuously, as she heard his hot, rapid words. What was she to do? What to

say? She could not stop to consider many alternatives, if they had existed. One thing only remained clear to her mind: she saw it, and strove towards it, as it were; it was all that she could discern through the tide of emotion which threatened to sweep her away on its rushing waves; and that one thing was the conviction that she must carry out her purpose. Not for a second must she entertain the idea of giving it up. She must answer no arguments, notice no sidelights, no incidental modifications of the case, but hold to the one thing, and it would bring her through the peril she was in.

'Do they know—your mother and sisters?' he asked, in a changed, yet eager, tone.

'Not yet. They will when I go in. They know I am going away as soon as I hear of employment.'

'Then, as they do not yet know that you have heard of it, your giving it up can be no disappointment to them. Listen to me! Promise me to give it up; to say nothing to

your mother and sisters, and when we get to Yoresett, I will ride back to the rectory, and tell Malleson that you have changed your mind, and do not wish him to take any further steps in the matter.'

'Mr. Aglionby, *you* are dreaming now. I shall do nothing of the kind, for I am quite determined to go to Irkford.'

'One moment,' he said, with forced calm, the nightmare-vision growing every moment more vivid and more horrible, of his queenly Judith becoming, as he had said, a 'servant amongst servants;' and later, exposed to all the horrors and all the dangers of life in a great hospital. It did more than wring his heart; it set his brain on fire, so that he felt scarce master of himself.

'One moment! You force me to take a tone which I am sufficiently ashamed of, but what else is left me? After all I have done in the hope of pleasing you—which in itself is nothing, would be too paltry to mention—but after my sacrifices to please you, surely

you will not be ungenerous enough to refuse this little favour to me? It is but a small thing I ask—for you to wait just a little while till something else is found—something, if you *will* wear the yoke, of a more human, less crushing kind than this. Now, you *cannot* refuse me this.'

In Aglionby's voice was entreaty of the tenderest and most persuasive nature.

'You ask impossibilities—you do not know what you say. I *must* go through with it,' said Judith, a sob in her voice, her heart like melted wax within her.

A short pause.

'But I cannot endure everything,' then said Aglionby, with constraint. 'There are things which no man with a man's spirit can brook, and one of them is to see a woman whom he lo——, whom he reverences as I reverence you, turned into a beast of burden, a servant, a drudge, while he stands by, without having moved heaven and earth to prevent it. But there is no need for me

to do that. You must remember that hitherto I have submitted to your will, and respected your prohibitions. This, however, passes human endurance. You cannot prevent me from seeing Mrs. Conisbrough, and trying whether she is equally hard and implacable as her daughter. I do not believe it, for my part. I do not believe she will treat me as you have done. *She* will not resent and be angry for ever, and if you persist——'

Judith turned cold and faint as she heard these words. The possibility of his proceeding to this extremity had never occurred to her, simple and natural though it was. It must not be done. She herself found it almost impossible to withstand the torrent of Aglionby's will. Her mother would succumb to it at once, and then the shame, and the intolerable degradation which would result!

'Mr. Aglionby, you must not see mamma!' she almost panted. 'You promised me—oh, you must not break your promise!'

'Am I to promise everything, and you nothing? All I ask is that you will yield to me a little. I *must* see Mrs. Conisbrough. I believe I have been very wrong in not doing so before. After all, she is the head of her own house. She, and not her child, possesses the authority to decide whether——'

'Mr. Aglionby—Bernard, oh, *please*, for the love of heaven, do not do this, unless you wish to kill me!' she cried, suddenly clinging with both hands to his arm, and standing quite still again in the darkness.

Aglionby felt a thrill of joy so keen as to be agony, as he felt the clasp of her hands upon his arm, and heard the beseeching accents of her voice. It was very dark; he could barely discern the dark outline of her figure close beside him, but he could hear her voice, broken and deep, imploring him with passion and with the accents in which, not hatred, but love, entreats a boon. These notes were not in the sweetest of all love's keys, but they were in *one* of love's keys—the only

one in which he might hear her voice address him. It was better than silence—he could not forego the delight of it yet. Let her plead! since neither he nor she might rejoice.

'*I* wish to kill you!' he retorted, breathlessly. 'That is a cruel taunt indeed. What have I been doing, but trying to prevent your killing yourself by inches—entombing yourself! *You* are obstinate, I perceive; but from your very voice I gather that your mother will not be so. I shall see her, and ask her to be reconciled with me.'

'Bernard, *dear* Bernard! I *implore* you—I implore you!

Her voice broke. She was still clinging to his arm, trembling violently, as he pereeived. The chill January night air had become as balmy to him as scented southern gales. The profound sky, the watching stars, the stillness, the voice ringing in his ears, intoxicated him. He took her hands; he folded his arm about her, and said, and his voice, too, was broken:

'My child, I believe I can refuse you nothing, though you should break my heart! What is this thing you implore?'

'The freedom to do what gives me the least pain in my wretched life. Do not speak to my mother! Be generous—you *are* generous. Can you not trust me? Can you not credit me with having good reasons for what I do? Some day, perhaps, I can tell you; some day, when we are old—if I am so unhappy as to live to be old. And when I tell you, you will say I was—I was right.'

She sobbed uncontrollably. Aglionby could not speak. She tried to turn away. From old habit, she would have shed her tears, borne her grief, alone and unsupported, but he would not let her. Because henceforth they were to be parted, through this crisis he would support her—in it he would console her; and he clasped his arm yet more closely about her; while she, feeling little save that he had yielded, rested her

racked and throbbing forehead upon his shoulder, and wept tears which were not altogether those of bitterness.

He raised his hand at last, and stroked her cheek with it as one would stroke the cheek of a grieved child. She raised herself, and stood upright.

'You have the best of all things—strength,' she said; 'as you are strong, so you will be generous, *I know*,' and carried the hand which had taken hers to her lips.

'And the reward of this generosity—is it the same which poor virtue gets?' he asked, almost in a whisper.

'What reward can a poor wretch like me give you? What can I do, except worship you with all my heart, and think you the first of men, as long as I live?'

Aglionby was silent, though his heart was on fire. Every fibre of his nature was appealed to—his love, and his wild desire to keep her his, as well as his chivalry and generosity. He said nothing; if he had

spoken, it must have been to call her his heart's delight, and tell her that he could never let her go again. In silence he conquered, and came through the ordeal honest—but not unscathed. It was one of the furnaces seven times heated, which yet are prepared for men and women to pass through; but from which the angels are gone who once attended to see that those who suffered came through unhurt. The crowd is greater and more ribald; freer than ever to hoot and jeer at a stumble or a faltering step; the flames are eager, as of yore, to lick up those who retreat. Some come through, fire-branded for the rest of their days; but, such is the mystery of anguish, purified too, cleansed as prosperity and success never cleanse their children.

He presently drew Judith's arm through his own, and in silence they pursued their way. She was utterly exhausted by the war of emotions which had shaken her, and could scarce put one foot before the other. They

met hardly a soul, but walked on along the lonesome country roads like creatures in a dream-world; almost as much alone too, until they arrived in Yoresett, as if the rest of the universe had been struck dead around them. He accompanied her to her mother's door, and they paused on the steps. The flickering light hanging from the market-cross opposite fell upon both faces, showing them with moderate clearness, the one to the other. Both were pale and changed. He stood a step or two lower than she did, and took her hand.

'Have I satisfied you?' he asked, in a low voice. 'Tell me the truth; remember, it has to last me all my life. Are you satisfied with me?'

'Perfectly, utterly, and entirely. Can you find any words to express more than "perfectly"? If so, they express my satisfaction. But not one exists to describe my gratitude to you.'

'In the time that is coming for me, I shall

suffer,' he said. 'You will not be alone in that; my sufferings will seem hard, to me, at least. Will you promise that when you are attending patients in hospital wards, and feeling compunction for their sufferings—as I know you will—will you then think of *me*—alone, wherever I am, and whoever may be with me, and remember that I suffer from a disease as hard to cure as any of theirs, and give a little of your pity to me, Judith?'

'Do not ask me to pity you. I shall think of you daily till I die; but how can I pity you? You are so strong, and so far above me. I could not pity you any more than I could pity my guardian angel.'

'Well, I know that you will not forget me. Therefore I say, may your path be made smoother for you; and fare you well!'

'God bless you!' was her sole response.

With a last long look at her, from eyes which were full of grief and full of melancholy, he turned away. Judith pulled the bell, and was admitted into the house.

With a vast effort she composed herself so as to join her mother and sisters at tea, when she told them what Mr. Malleson had offered her, and that she had accepted it; upon which information no comments were passed. But as soon as the meal was over she went to her own room, where, cold though it was, she could be alone. There she was free to begin the meditations which should have beguiled her homeward way. Fresh elements made themselves felt in her calculations; new factors appeared in her sum of events.

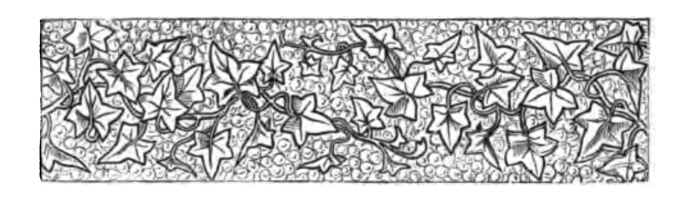
Was it a victory she had gained, or was it a deliverance through unbounded generosity? The last, the last, she told herself, with tears of joy which streamed down her face in the darkness. She had fought her fight, and she had been conquered; she had measured her will against that of Aglionby, and had very soon been reduced to falling on her knees and crying 'Quarter!' Had it been otherwise she would not have felt as she did

now—would have been destitute of that sensation of calm, assured repose in a superior strength which outweighs the feverish joys of a hundred victories to souls like hers, at least.

She had an exceeding great reward in the knowledge that not only was he stronger than she was, but that he was also good, gentle, chivalrous. She was calm, she was free from torturing accusations of conscience. Her heart was sadder and gladder too, than it ever had been before. Her path was yet rough, her future sad, but she had found one who was strong and generous, high-souled and pitiful; and this one had seen her too, and had found in her such harmony with his own soul that he loved her. Their love was to be discrowned; that, in the exaltation of this moment seemed to her a matter of small consequence. What she knew was so full and so satisfying. Her fears were laid to rest. He also had renounced, and she at last felt the most entire confidence in his renunciation.

She no longer needed to deny even to herself that she loved him, or to blush guiltily when the knowledge of her love rushed upon and overwhelmed her. There was now no sin and no selfishness in her love. The great peace which follows on the accomplishment of a pure and holy sacrifice was hers; the consolation which Mr. Malleson had wished for her she had received, and in her heart just then was the peace which passeth understanding.



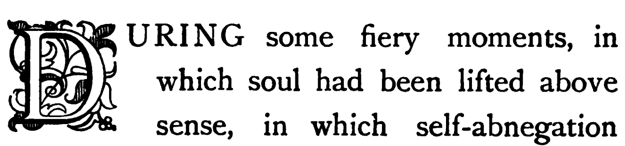


CHAPTER VIII.

'HER FEET ARE ON THE MOUNTAINS.'

'Et après tout, le rêve, n'est-il pas le pain quotidien de l'existence? La vie, n'est-elle pas l'esperance sans cesse renouvellée du moment qui va suivre? Chaque instant du jour, n'est-il pas une attente, un espoir, un souhait, une fiction? Dépouillez la réalité de cette efflorescence, de cette végétation . . . . et voyez ce qu'il en reste! La réalité n'est que le prétexte de la vie. Ce qui est n'est que la pierre étroite sur laquelle nous mettons le pied pour nous elançer vers ce qui n'est pas.'

LES ETANGS.



DURING some fiery moments, in which soul had been lifted above sense, in which self-abnegation had risen supreme, Aglionby had made *his* 'great renunciation,' and had experienced at the time all the exalted joy which such re-

nunciations bring to those who consummate them. In his walk of an hour with Judith Conisbrough, he, like her, had lived through emotion enough to last him for years; at least, it is very certain that life, if constantly distracted by such emotions, could not be carried on; this poor, imperfect frame, this godlike reason, would succumb under an uninterrupted succession of such excitements. This is so trite as to be a truism. Yet it is a truism we are apt to dispute when the days have to be lived through which follow—as in Aglionby's case they did—upon the few moments, or hours, or days, as the case may be, of intense, highly-strung, mental life: days so grey, so blank and drear, they are like some bare and solitary rock in a northern ocean.

Through such days he had to pass; for a long, blank, uneventful winter followed upon that night of feverish hope and anguish, love and longing and renunciation. He went home and stayed there, and people said how

very quiet he was, and how little he cared for any society—except, they added, with surprise, that of Randulf Danesdale. The two men were so utterly dissimilar, said these discerning critics, in tastes, habits, and dispositions, that it was quite marvellous they should have become such sworn allies. So it was, however; like or unlike, they were almost inseparable.

The simple fact was that each knew the other's heart. There was something so inwardly similar in their lots, that this likeness alone must have drawn them together; not that any effusive interchange of sentiment, or exchange of confidences, had taken place between them. They had never touched openly on the subjects which lay nearest their hearts. But by bit and bit, over a pipe at this time, during some long dark ride on another occasion, in Bernard's snuggery, or in Randulf's den, they had got pretty clearly to understand what were each other's chiefest hopes and fears, desires or regrets. Randulf

knew now that Aglionby's marriage was simply a matter of honour on his side, as to the necessity for consummating which not a doubt had ever entered his mind. Nor had it ever occurred to Randulf to think that there was any way out of it for his friend; they were gentlemen, therefore such a possibility was out of the sphere of their thoughts. That Aglionby was to marry Lizzie Vane, and do all in his power to make her life delightful to her, 'understood itself' with both of them, without their ever saying to themselves, '*Noblesse oblige.*' Aglionby had never in so many words told Danesdale that he loved Judith Conisbrough, but the other guessed it from a thousand slight signs and tokens, which perhaps could not have been read save by a man who was himself in love. He had first felt certain on the point one day in the middle of February, when, sitting with Aglionby over their pipes, he had casually remarked:

'By the way, I happened to be at Hawes

station, yesterday morning, by a strange chance, and I saw Miss Conisbrough and her sisters. They were seeing her off to Irkford; she is going to live there, Rhoda told me.'

There was a very long pause before Bernard at length lifted his eyes to his friend's face, and said slowly:

'Yes, I knew she was going; I did not know when.'

Something in eyes and voice told Randulf that her going was no small trouble to Aglionby.

Randulf, for his part, had spoken more openly to Bernard of his troubles and intentions.

'Of course I've given her up for ever,' he said. 'A girl may refuse the man she cares for from a thousand reasons; but she would not have held out against my father, as she did, unless she had been in deadly earnest.'

'No.'

'My father has been goodness itself about

it. Not one man in a thousand would have behaved as he has done. He wants me more than anything to get married. I know he is miserable until there are, at any rate, one or two small Danesdales to insure a succession. But he told me—though I know for a fact, you know, that this thing lies nearer to his heart than anything else—he told me, "Don't marry to please me. Wait five years, if you choose. I shall say nothing." Of course,' continued Randulf, with his slowest drawl, as he knocked the ash from his pipe, 'I shall not wait five years—not I! I'll let the worst get over, and then I must look out for a Mrs. Danesdale—a sophisticated young woman, you know, up to everything, who won't care much for me, nor yet expect me to care much for her. One outlives everything, if only one stays above ground long enough. I foresee myself a decent old Philistine, with a stately Philistiness as my consort, and irreproachably well-brought-up daughters coming out at county balls; but'—his mouth twitched—

'never one of them all will make me feel as I felt at the bare sight of my little broken-hearted Delphine.'

'Feeling like that has got nothing to do with being married,' said Aglionby, composedly. 'But, as you say, only keep above ground long enough, and you may calculate on getting not to care, at any rate.'

Adversity did not make Aglionby altogether fuller of sweetness and light than he had been of yore. He told himself, when he thought about it at all, that he was born a crabbed, sour creature; destined to live alone, that he had been too heavily handicapped to go in and win, when the one chance came to him of mating with a spirit which would have softened and made him better. All he could do, had been to glance in at the open gate, to behold the radiant courts of harmony and love, and the soft sunshine within; and then, ere he had had time to stretch his hands towards it all, or to put his foot forward, the gates had been closed again, and he was left

shivering outside in the darkness and cold. He retired to his crustiness and abruptness, as a snail to his shell. He showed to Randulf Danesdale alone another side of his nature. For the rest, he did his duties: attended to the social tasks which were set him, all with a sardonic coolness peculiar to himself. Randulf Danesdale did the same. No one could say of them that they absented themselves from the gatherings of their fellow-creatures to which they were bidden. What was said, and that unanimously, was, that they were the most disappointing young men ever known. Mr. Aglionby, it was remarked, had a way of turning the most harmless and amiable feelings into ridicule, and displayed a readiness to see the worst side of things, to look for the meanest motives behind the most innocent actions, and to shrug his shoulders when sinners were found out, in a way that was most painful to sensitive feelings, while Randulf Danesdale did not appear to have any interest in anything;

or if he did talk, he talked in a way that no one could understand.

Mrs. Bryce was still at Scar Foot. More than once she had suggested leaving, and still her nephew begged her to remain, if she did not find it too dull. After all, he had not had a stick or a straw altered at the old house. He had reminded himself that Lizzie would never of her own free will come to it, and why, if the furniture pleased him as it was, should he make a great upsetting just because it was usual to upset things on the occasion of one's marriage? He left it. Once or twice his aunt asked him if he did not think of going to Irkford, to which he replied:

'Oh, I shall be running over some time soon, but Lizzie was to send for me if she wanted me; and indeed, she gives me broad hints that when a trousseau is preparing, a man is rather in the way than otherwise.'

With which explanation Mrs. Bryce had to be satisfied. She too knew perfectly well

now, that Bernard's heart was not in his marriage. She too, shrugged her shoulders, and said within herself:

'What a pity! But of course he must go through with it.'

Thus he remained at Scar Foot, and watched the winter work out its course; and felt the first breath of spring blow over the earth; and saw her gradual awakening from her winter sleep—the trees and bushes taking a first faint hue of green; the skies growing bluer, the days longer; the airs blowing more rejoicingly; the seedtime on the farm lands. He watched the ploughman, in the few places where corn was grown—for 'little corne groweth in Danesdale'—the patient horses toiling in the furrow; the clank of the plough, the rattle of the harrow, the long ridges; the rich hue of the mould as it fell from the sharp plough; the man's voice calling in broad Swaledale dialect to his horses.

He beheld (what he had never seen before) the first spring flowers pushing their way

upwards to return the smile of the sun, and the kiss of the westerly breezes. To him it was all miraculous, for he beheld it for the first time. Each flower was a wonder to him, nor did he soon forget how one day he had found himself standing beside glorious Stanniforth Force, hurling itself tumultuously over its rocks, while all the banks were a waste, a rioting wilderness of primrose and cowslip, and fair anemone, and dainty little pink primulas dotted the marshy spots.

Aglionby would have laughed aloud had anyone suggested that he was a poet, yet why, if he were not a poet, did he feel then as if he must shout aloud with the rejoicing waterfall, or fall down and bury himself in those dewy banks of spring flowers ?

He watched, as country folk on their part will watch the garish scenes of a theatre, so he spied out how the feet of the spring gradually stole over the mountains, and how, as she advanced, the leaping becks sprang forth to salute her, and, swollen with melted snow

leaped like melted snow themselves, from steep to steep, shouting with joy.

Though he could wonder, and wonder for ever, he could but half rejoice, for where was she who had loved these hills and vales, as he well knew, who had loved beyond all this very 'fair Scar Foot'?

Did those eyes of hers turn sometimes with wistful, hungry longing towards the north? Did her feet, as they paced the dingy flags, weary for the springing turf? And when her head ached in the heavy city air, did she not remember the scented breezes that played about the old house beneath the Scar? Did she recall the 'fields bedewed' which surrounded it, and in which he was free to wander?

One day in the middle of April, as he rode out of the courtyard into the road, he saw Rhoda Conisbrough alone, with a basket on her arm. She was walking lingeringly past, gazing with all her eyes at what was to be seen of the house, the orchard, and farm-

buildings. When she saw him she started, blushed guiltily, and hastened her pace. Aglionby dismounted in haste, raised his cap and held out his hand.

'Miss Conisbrough! This is a surprise. Were you coming to Scar Foot?'

'To Scar Foot—no! I'm going to Mereside to find some particular moss for Delphine to paint—so I looked in, that was all. You need not think I was going to trespass,' she added with a look of defiance.

'I wish you had been,' he said, wistfully; 'never would trespasser have been so welcome. Since you have come so far, at least step in and rest. Let my aunt entertain you.'

'No, I must not,' said Rhoda, shaking her head. 'But would you really like me to? Would you wish me to enter Scar Foot?'

'More than anything—but there, I must not press you; I know it is against orders. How is Mrs. Conisbrough?'

'Pretty well, thank you.'

'And your sisters?'

'Delphine is pretty well too.'

'And Miss Conisbrough? You have good accounts of her, I hope?'

'Oh, I suppose so. She has begun to nurse in the hospital, and, as she does not like it, it made her very ill at first; but she is getting over it. Is something the matter with you?'

'N-no, thank you. I hope nothing serious was the matter with her?'

'Oh no! Something that they call hospital sore-throat, I think. Very horrid, but not dangerous, I fancy. They say they all have it.'

'Horrible! Did she not come home to be nursed?'

'Judith come home! Oh dear, no!'

'Listen, Miss Conisbrough. At the end of this month I am going away from Scar Foot. I am going to be married, and as my future wife dislikes the country exceedingly——'

'What extraordinary tastes she must have!'

'I do not know when I shall return. Not for a long time, at any rate. Now, seeing that I shall be away, and cannot possibly annoy you by my presence, do you not think you could persuade yourselves to come to Scar Foot now and then, when you wanted such a walk, and——'

'I should have to come alone, then. Delphine told me that neither she nor Judith ever meant to enter Scar Foot again. I don't know what their reasons may be, I'm sure, but that is what they said. Everything is very stupid—so dismal and mysterious. No, I think I won't promise, Mr. Aglionby, but I see you would not object if I did come.'

'I should feel as if a ban had been lifted from my house and me,' he said.

'It is well you are going to be married,' observed Rhoda, composedly, 'for they say there is an old legend that it is dangerous to live alone at Scar Foot.'

'I have found it so,' he replied. And she

inclined her head to him, and passed on. Aglionby, as he rode away, wondered how much longer he could endure this sort of thing.

On various pretexts, Lizzie had deferred the date of their marriage till the middle of May. But the day after his interview with Rhoda, the newspapers brought the announcement that Parliament was to be dissolved in a week. The Government, unable to carry one or two of their favourite measures, had resolved to appeal to the country.

The news acted like magic upon Aglionby's mood. It brought back in a great measure his old eager political bias; his ardour and verve, and zeal for the Liberal cause. Above all, it offered him something to do, something with which to occupy himself during that dreary month of waiting, which had yet to elapse before his still more dreary wedding could come off, and his married life, dreariest of all, should commence. Long ago—last year, before the great meeting in October had

come off, he and others had agreed, in the event of a general election, to canvass certain districts, and to do their utmost to help forward the cause. What reason was there why he should not even now be as good as his word? He could not merely canvass now, he could help with money. He would revisit his old friends of the Irkford *Daily Chronicle*, and offer his services. His decision was soon taken.

The very idea of sitting inactive at Scar Foot, while all the life and fight and din of battle were going on, was impossible. One fine morning, after recommending Mrs. Bryce to enjoy herself in whatsoever manner seemed good unto her, he drove to Hawes, and took the train from that place to Irkford.





CHAPTER IX.

UNAWARES.

HE arrived at Irkford towards the middle of the afternoon, and drove to the office of his old friend the Irkford *Daily Chronicle*. A few words served to explain his changed position, and to make it clear that he desired to offer his money and services to the cause.

Needless to say, that both were rapturously accepted. Aglionby had an interview with the editor, who remembered his letters, signed 'Pride of Science,' perfectly, and would be delighted to receive more communications from the same able pen. There was a dis-

cussion on ways and means, and as such vigorous help as Bernard's was particularly welcome in the 'throng' of work which had so suddenly overtaken the staff of the *Chronicle*, he was let into all the secrets of the plan of the campaign, promised to go and dine with the editor at his club at half-past seven that night, and then, saying *au revoir*, he departed.

'Where to, sir?' asked the cabman who had been waiting for him.

'Crane Street—or, stop! Do you know the Nurses' Home, Fence Street?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, drive slowly past it, and then get on as fast as you like to 13, Crane Street.'

He had always known vaguely where the Nurses' Home was; that is, he had passed and repassed it scores and hundreds of times, almost, without noticing its existence.

It did not take long to get to Fence Street, where the driver began to slacken his pace. The Nurses' Home was almost opposite to

his old prison-house, the warehouse of Messrs. Jenkinson, Sharpe, and Co. There was little about it to distinguish it from the other buildings in the street which, noisy and dirty as it now was, had in former days been one of the aristocratic quarters of the town, as was testified by the numerous large, handsome, and massively-built houses which at one end formed a kind of square round a black, hideous, and melancholy church.

Many of these houses were the town-residences or consulting-rooms of doctors; on one of the brass door-plates was the inscription, 'Dr. Hugh Wentworth.' Next door to this was the Nurses' Home, a similar but rather larger house, with very clean steps and brightly-polished windows. Not a face or a form was discernible at any of them. The cabman walked his horse slowly past the house, and then, whipping it up, Bernard was hurried towards the rapturous moment when he should meet his betrothed.

His colloquy with the editor and sub-

editor of the *Chronicle* had taken up some time. It was evening, fully half-past six, though of course broad daylight, when he arrived at 13 Crane Street. He would only have time to have a short interview with Lizzie, and leave his portmanteau, and then it would be time for him to go to town again and meet Mr. Williamson, the editor.

As he approached the house, he mechanically felt in his waistcoat-pocket (such is the force of old and long-continued habit) for his latch-key; and was amused to find it there. The garment was one which he must have worn when he had last been staying there, and he had carried the latch-key away without knowing it. Without ringing the bell he ran up the steps, opened the door, and entered.

Was it a dream? Some one ran out of the back-parlour, as of old she used to run, exclaiming in a tone of welcome:

'Oh, here you are! I'm so glad you are early. Come in! Why . . . *Bernard!* I——'

Never blest with a superfluity of wit in an emergency, Miss Vane, white and trembling, leaned up against the wall, pressing her hand to her bosom ; and staring at him with wide-open blue eyes, in which blank surprise was gradually giving place to terror.

'Lizzie—what ails you? You look rather horrified than otherwise to see me,' he began ; and then, seeing that the driver had placed his portmanteau in the passage, and was standing in the doorway, looking intelligently interested in the whole proceedings, Aglionby paid and dismissed him, pushed the door to without noticing that it was not absolutely shut, and once more turned to Lizzie, who, though she had recovered from her first shock, was still suffering from visible and extreme embarrassment.

'Perhaps I ought to have let you know, Lizzie,' he said, taking her hand, and drawing her into the parlour, where she stood as one paralysed, looking at him blankly and with something like terror—with anything rather

than pleasure or welcome. Her hand lay limply in his, she said no word—made no sign. Always, before now, she had made some show of welcoming him. He looked earnestly at her, struck and puzzled by her demeanour, and he discovered that she was elaborately dressed, and that, despite her paleness and disturbance, she looked very lovely in a gown of some soft, forget-me-not blue stuff, profusely trimmed with silk, and with dainty lace ruffles at the neck and elbows. On the table lay a white fleecy-looking mantle, and a pair of long, pale blue silk gloves, the colour of her dress. The house was very quiet—so quiet that it might have been empty.

'You are going out somewhere!' he said. 'Is Mrs. Vane out?'

'Yes,' came in a low voice from Lizzie's parted lips, as she still seemed almost insensibly to shrink away from him.

He still held her hand, and attempted to draw her nearer to him; but by some

slight movement she evaded him, and he continued:

'Where are you off to, and with whom?'

She rallied herself with a great effort, and said, though in a voice which had a strong nervous quiver in it:

'I—we were going to the theatre, the Goldings and I. And—Percy—he was to call for me, and—and——'

'Oh, I see.' He smiled. 'Well, I wish I could join you; but I've come over on electioneering business, and am going to a meeting to-night with Mr. Williamson, so perhaps you will excuse me. And—is it quite convenient to your mother to put me up here, Lizzie? because, if not——But why do you look so nervous and disturbed, child? Surely my coming, even unexpectedly, cannot have upset you in this manner.'

For even he, though in matters of deportment not the most observant, and certainly the least suspicious of men, could not but feel surprised at her continued pallor and nervous-

ness. Lizzie was racking her brains to contrive some means of escaping from him, if only for three minutes, of scribbling a pencil note, and sending her mother's domestic flying with it to the Goldings' house. She could not look unconcerned, while pondering in dire distress of mind upon how best to carry out this scheme. She now stammered :

'Excuse me a moment, Bernard. I have left something upstairs. I must—go——'

'My dear child, you are not fit to move, until you have sat down and rested a little, and taken a little wine, or smelt some salts, or whatever is the proper thing to do. Sit down here, and tell me what's the matter with you.'

He drew her with gentle but irresistible force to an easy-chair, seated himself beside her, and instinctively began to pity her, as it was his nature to pity anything that looked frightened or alarmed, and Miss Vane's countenance at that moment was strongly expressive of both these emotions.

There came a sudden sharp knock at the front door; then it was pushed open; a footstep was heard in the passage, and a voice cried: 'Now, Lizzie, where are you?'

Lizzie started up, visibly in an agony of apprehension. With Bernard, surprise and pity had been transformed like magic into the blackest suspicion.

'Let me speak to him!' said Lizzie, breathlessly.

'No; let him come here,' retorted Aglionby, still holding her hand fast. 'How dare he call you "Lizzie" in that fashion? Come on, Percy!' he cried aloud, in a dry, distinct voice, 'Miss Vane is waiting for you—and, for the matter of that, so am I!' he added beneath his breath.

There was a momentary pause in the footsteps. Then they came on again, the door opened, and Percy appeared. When he saw them he looked, first astonished, then appalled, but at last uttered slowly, 'Aglionby—you!' and came to a dead pause.

'Yes, I—why not?' remarked Bernard, never loosing his hold of Lizzie's hand, and seeing clearly enough now that *something* would have to be explained before many minutes should have passed.

He looked steadily at Percy for a little while, and at last observed:

'It's true I've arrived unexpectedly, but I should have looked for a warmer welcome from you both, I must say.'

'Bernard, let go my hand!' suddenly exclaimed his betrothed, pettishly. 'What's the use of standing there glaring at me? You have frightened me half out of my senses already. Mr. Golding, did you bring a cab, and is Lucy ready?'

She looked hard at him as she spoke, as though she would convey some hint to him by her steadfast gaze. Percy was far too much embarrassed to be able to understand any such subtle modes of communicating ideas, and he replied, lamely:

'Lucy—no—why, did you want Lucy to go?'

A short, sarcastic laugh broke from Aglionby, while Lizzie's fair face was covered with an angry blush.

'Frightened you half out of your senses, have I? I'm sorry if that is the feeling with which my coming, however sudden, inspired you, considering that we proposed so soon to be husband and wife. *Fear* is not exactly the emotion a man would wish to excite in his bride.'

Lizzie had snatched her hand out of his, and, with the angry colour yet high on her cheeks, was looking at him, half with dislike, half with trepidation—an expression which he did not fail to remark.

'Now for it!' he thought. 'She has cheated me all along, and made a fool of me. Now I am going to be put in the position of the despised and rejected. Good Lord! suppose I cared for her?'

He turned aside, half-seating himself on the edge of a table, and watched the rest of the scene with the sarcastic smile of a looker-

on: a smile uncommonly like a sneer, and with a gleam in his eyes as cold and mocking as had ever in his worst days dwelt there. Whatever the inward progress towards 'sweetness and light' which his nature might have made, little of it was visible now—indeed, he felt nothing but contempt for all three of them: for Lizzie's double-dealing; for Percy's dishonest treatment of him, who had been his friend; for himself most of all, and his sublime fatuousness and credulity in imagining that Lizzie was in love with him.

His last remarks, alluding to 'husband and wife,' and to a man and his bride, appeared to goad Percy beyond endurance; for, looking exceedingly agitated, he advanced, stretched out his hands, and cried in a portentous voice:

'Lizzie Vane! The time for playing and trifling is past. I can bear this no longer. I never knew till this moment what it is to confront a friend whom one has deceived——'

Lizzie, not expecting rebuke from Percy, cast herself into a chair, and began to cry.

Mr. Golding proceeded:

'Choose between us! To please you, I have lived in torment for the last six months. You know I adore you, and you have told me you loved me. You must——'

'She has said she loved you?' said Bernard, dryly. 'In that case, it is perfectly evident she cannot love me. If I had known this sooner, Percy—it is not exactly what I should have expected from "mine own familiar friend."'

There was a softer tone in his voice as he spoke these words, and when he heard it Percy's emotion (for he was a good creature, and honest, where Lizzie Vane was out of the question) became altogether overpowering. In a choked voice, he replied;

'I know it, Aglionby, I know it. It is because I loved her so. I wanted to speak. I wanted to be fair and honourable. But she

said she must dismiss you herself. She exacted this silence from me, and——'

Lizzie was here understood to sob out that she had never been so shamefully treated in her life. But here Bernard interposed, still speaking in the same dry, cold manner.

'There can only be one termination to this affair. From the manner in which Miss Vane received me this evening, I clearly saw that I was not welcome, though I was far from guessing the reason why. Now, Lizzie, oblige me by listening to me, and answering me.'

He softened his voice, and took her hand, and honestly tried to look gentle and conciliating. He could not help it if his face looked black as a thunder-cloud.

Lizzie fixed her frightened, fascinated eyes upon him, half-rising from her chair, as he went on:

'I don't wish to be unjust to you. I wish to know no particulars. But tell me this: let us have an understanding. Do you love

Percy Golding here, or do you wish to be my wife ?'

As he asked this question, with all the solemnity imaginable, there was borne into his mind a keen sense of the bitter absurdity of the whole affair. Yet, though it was some time since he had cared for Lizzie, he had honestly and thoroughly believed that she cared for him, and it was not gratifying either to his *amour propre*, or to the feeling of chivalry, of gentlemanly honour, which had kept him loyal to her, when, after looking from one to the other of them she suddenly darted to Percy's side, saying, in accents that carried conviction to both her hearers :

'I love Percy — I am frightened of you, Bernard. You crush me, when you look at me in that way, and I can't marry you—it's no good, I can't, I can't ! Oh dear !'

She cast her arms about Percy's neck, laid her head on his shoulder, and cried heartily again.

Percy was agitated, distressed, but triumphant through it all.

Aglionby felt a singular sensation pierce his heart. He knew the girl now exactly for what she was, and valued her accurately at her true worth, or, for him, worthlessness. But once it had been different. He had never seen an intellectual or highly-cultivated woman in her, but he had seen a tender, loving girl—a true and faithful sweetheart. And he had looked to find some consolation in faithfully, on his part, doing his utmost to make her happy.

As he saw her sobbing in Percy's arms, and recalled her look of blank terror and aversion, a thousand signs and tokens rushed into his mind, which went to prove her fear of him, and the oppression she must have felt in regard to him. It was a humiliating, a painful, and a saddening discovery.

He waited for a little while, till her weeping had ceased, and she looked up again, and then he said:

'Nothing is left for me but to say farewell to you. After what I have learnt just now, I cannot suppose that my opinion is of much consequence to you, but let me tell you that I hold you utterly free from blame—utterly. We both made a mistake a year ago, and I have been a blind, conceited fool all this time to imagine that you had not found it out—as I had done. My conscience in the matter is not so pure that I can afford to even whisper a reproach to you; therefore, Lizzie, will you consent to shake hands with me as a friend; and when Percy is your husband, will you receive me sometimes as *his* friend?'

She avoided his eyes, but let him take her hand, and say something further to her; and she murmured something which might be intended for farewell. Bernard looked at Percy, and held out his hand to him. Percy blushed uncomfortably, remembering his own duplicity in the matter; but finally they exchanged a pressure of the hand, and, without

speaking, it was understood that they were still friends.

With a slight bow, Bernard left the room, took his small portmanteau in his hand, let himself out of the house, hailed a passing hansom, and told the man to drive him to a certain hotel in town. As he was driven back through the same streets which he had less than an hour ago traversed, he meditated, and by-and-by the feeling of pain he had felt yielded again to that of cynical and bitter amusement. Before he went to the meeting he wrote a letter to Mrs. Bryce, in which he informed her:

'Your astute and worldly-wise nephew has this evening discovered that he has been made an utter fool of—and that by two persons for whose intellect he has always felt, and often expressed, great contempt. That this experience has left him with a feeling of exhilaration rather than one of depression is accounted for by the fact that it is simply the price he has had to pay for his release from

a position which was loathsome to him. In other words, my dear aunt, my sweetheart has jilted me, and I am very glad of it. If Randulf Danesdale should happen to call upon you, which he is pretty certain to do, tell him this, and oblige me by making it very plain to him, for it is the truth, that it was the lady who would have none of me, not I who was desirous of breaking with her.'

Then he went to the meeting, and by-and-by began to enjoy it. He resolved to stay in Irkford until the election should be quite over.

At night, when he went to bed, he took stock of his own mental and moral condition, and summed it up thus: Befooled and jilted by one woman; solemnly vowed to renounce another—and happier than he ever had been in his life.



CHAPTER X.

'FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.'

JULY, more than three years later; the scene, one of the front rooms at the Nurses' Home, Fence Street, Irkford; the persons, a man and a woman, alone—he, standing on the hearth-rug, where he had been waiting some two or three minutes; she, just closing the door behind her as she came in.

The man was Dr. Hugh Wentworth; the woman, Judith Conisbrough.

He was a young-looking man—even surprisingly young when one considered the high position he had, and the really vast re-

sponsibilities which devolved upon him. But on looking more closely, one saw that if he were young in years, yet he was one of those men who are born with master-minds. One forgot entirely that he was young and handsome, and pleasant to look upon, so much were these advantages overweighed by the intellectual ones—by the fire that dwelt in the deep eyes, by the grand sweep of the magnificent forehead, the mental *power* expressed in every line and every feature.

Till Judith entered, he had been leaning against the mantelpiece with his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes raised to the dingy-looking ceiling above, and he heaved a sigh. Even those two or three moments of sorely-needed leisure, of waiting and inaction, were hardly spared and much grudged.

He had not been kept waiting very long. In that establishment punctuality and alertness were laws as immutable as those of the Medes and Persians. There was she whom

he sought, walking into the room, looking different from her old self, as you, reader, have known her, because she had a white cap on her head, a black gown, a white apron of lawn with a stomacher, all edged with little plaited frills of the same material.

'Good-afternoon, nurse,' he observed, holding out his hand.

'Good-afternoon. We meet for the first time to-day, I think?'

'Yes. There is a small matter of business which I wish to discuss with you,' said he, and paused.

She had moved nearer to the window, and now stood beside it, looking at him. Then, when the broader light fell upon her, one saw that the cap and apron, the badges of her order, were not the only things to distinguish her from the Judith Conisbrough of three years ago. She looked, if anything, a little taller, possibly a very little stouter, and her carriage, if not more stately, was a little more decided than of yore.

She looked a queenly woman now, in her garb of nursing sister, just as she had formerly looked a queenly woman in her shabby old gowns; in her sorrow, her poverty, her bitter unhappiness at Yoresett House, when the curse of enforced idleness, and the grip of a forbidden love, were upon her. But her face was changed. It had altered in the way in which the faces of women do alter, in whom heart is as strong as head.

No acute or even intelligent observer would have dared to say that that face wore an altogether happy, or peaceful, or satisfied expression; the faces of those who aim high and feel deeply, seldom, if ever, do look perfectly placid. There was a calm and settled power in it, not inferior, in its way, to that which dwelt in the countenance of Dr. Wentworth himself. The eyes were steady, scrutinising, and critical. It was the mouth which betrayed, more than anything else, the touch of sadness and dissatisfaction. It was when the face was in entire repose that the

lips took that curve which makes one feel as if a sigh had either just left, or was on the point of leaving them.

For the rest, one could see that she was in every way developed. She had more ease as well as more dignity of manner. She was more beautiful than before, as well as older; her face and form now more than ever were such as the most heedless could not fail to observe.

Neither she nor Dr. Wentworth sat down. Each knew the time of the other to be precious.

'You go home for your holiday to-morrow?' he said half-inquiringly.

'Yes. A fortnight amongst the Yorkshire hills will not be unpleasant.'

'I wish you would take a month,' was his abrupt remark.

'A month—why?' Her eyes opened a little, as she looked at him in some surprise. 'Not because I look ill, surely—for I never felt better in my life.'

'No; but because I wish you on your return to take a great deal more responsibility on your shoulders, and you will require some thorough rest and setting up before you undertake it.'

'Indeed. And what is it you wish me to do?'

'My wife,' said he, smiling, 'charged me to tell you that you were to do as I wished, on pain of forfeiting her friendship. Now, before I explain, let me tell you it is an onerous post I wish you to take. Little rest, and much care and anxiety. Perhaps few friends, and lots of enemies. That for the disagreeable part of it. For the more agreeable: it ought to gratify that ambition of yours, to which you have never yet owned, though it is as patent to me as the sun in a sky without clouds—it ought to gratify that ambition, because it is a post of authority and consequence, and is well remunerated. I want you to become the Matron of the new Hospital at Ridgeford.'

She raised her head quickly; her lips parted, and she looked at him in astonishment for a moment. Then her face flushed deeply, and she turned her eyes to the prospect outside.

Dr. Wentworth watched her unobtrusively, but with the keenest and liveliest interest. He had been her staunch friend ever since the evening he had first seen her, in this very room, standing before him in her bonnet and cloak, to be inspected, when she had said, with a naïveté which had amused him, and an earnestness which had gratified him:

'I do not know what you can give me to do, but I beg you will give me something. If it is only sweeping and dusting, let me have it: do not send me back.'

He had not sent her back, for he had correctly discerned (which even genius does not always succeed in doing) that she was one of those tools which will work well, and he had from the first let her see that he expected a great deal from her. He had not

been disappointed, and he had been charmed, like inferior men, to find his own prophetic verdict so thoroughly realised.

The more he asked of work, or study, or observation, or, as he would say in moments of expansiveness to the wife of his bosom, 'of general all-round perfection in her work and her behaviour,' the more she had seemed ready and willing to give him.

Under his influence and by his advice, she had received training, not only in nursing, but in some branches of medicine and surgery as well. He had said little to her during her studies in these subjects, but had one day, not long ago, surprised her by proposing to her that she should study medicine thoroughly, and adopt it as a profession, adding that she had nothing to fear, and would make her way.

He had calculated on that ambition, in which he now told her he still believed; but it had not answered to the call. Judith had declined, saying she had no vocation.

Mingled motives, so delicately shaded and complicated that she could not possibly have explained their whence or wherefore, had led her to this refusal. He had been as nearly angry with her as possible, saying in remonstrance :

'Scores of women, who really have no vocation for it, who want notoriety, or are curious about things they don't understand, or who want to make a living, and think they have fewer rivals in the medical line than in the schoolmistress one—they all rush into it, pushing to the front, and making themselves a spectacle for gods and men. Here are you—the very sort we want as a pioneer for women-doctors—high-minded and high-hearted, with a pure reverence for science and humanity, with every qualification, mental, moral, and physical. And you will not. You ought to lead the way, to be one of the pioneers on that road where the women who follow after you will some day be great.'

Judith had shaken her head, smiling.

'You are quite mistaken,' she said. 'I lay no claims to a "pure reverence for science and humanity," as you call it. I know nothing about them, except that the one is really great, and the other is thought so by some people. Do you suppose I became a nurse because I wished to do so? Not at all, and I never would have done it if I could have had a happier lot. I "took to it," as they say, because I was miserable, and wanted relief from my wretchedness; I did not like it then, and I do not like it now. You may think me a poor-spirited creature; but I would rather stay here and do as you tell me, and act under orders, than be the first and cleverest woman-doctor of all time.'

'You are trying to cajole me by flattery.'

'I am speaking the simple, unvarnished truth.'

'My wife says indignantly—as if it were my fault—that if she had had your qualifications I should never have got her to marry me.'

'Oh, how could she say such a thing? It is almost wicked of her,' Judith had said, and she had remained immovable. Yes, she thought it a glorious profession, she said, the noblest that existed——

'Bar the clerical one,' he had suggested, with a malicious smile.

'Bar none,' had been Judith's emphatic retort. And she would honour a really clever medical woman, and would be quite ready to darn her stockings and do her drudgery. The position itself, of a medical woman, she declined. This refusal, and their dispute about it, was in Dr. Wentworth's mind now, as he observed her keenly, and noted every change that passed over her face.

'I shall think you wish to be unfriendly to me, if you refuse me this,' he said. 'You are familiar with all the details of the scheme; you have heard them discussed at my house often enough. You know what the duties will be. The salary will be three hundred a year. Now, where is your "Yes"?'

'"Yes" is sometimes a very hard word to say, Dr. Wentworth.'

'It ought not to be so, when duty cries for it so very loudly, as in this case.'

'You are the chief of the council, and the real head of it, are you not?'

'I am.'

'And would you always give me your friendship, your counsel, and your advice?'

'You may depend upon them entirely.'

'It would be a very useful sphere?' she said, musingly.

'You, as well as I, know *how* useful. In that place you will be an influence, and a beneficent one, on hundreds. My dear friend,' he took her hand, 'apart from all other considerations, the woman who worthily fills that office, as it will be when it is developed, and as you will fill it—with its trials and its difficulties, its powers and its opportunities for doing good—that woman may, if the right spirit animate her, attain to the rank of the other good women whose names

ought to stand opposite saints' days in men's and women's hearts.'

'Then I cannot be worthy of it,' said she, moved.

'And I say you are; and I say that if you will not take it, I know not where to put my hand on any other woman qualified as you are qualified for it.'

'If I took it, I should have to make up my mind that it should be for the rest of my life?'

'You would.'

A long pause. He did not interrupt her, nor press her for an answer, for, precious as the time of both was, these moments of reflection and turning-over were absolutely necessary. He leaned against the mantel-piece in silence, and she stood by the window, equally silent, seeing, without heeding them, all the throng of men and vehicles which streamed incessantly up and down the noisy thoroughfare.

What visions did she tear to shreds, he

wondered, as he watched her without letting her see his observation—what hopes did she finally immolate? what bright illusions of girlhood did she lock out from her heart for ever? Could he have known, he would have been aware that she had never had any youth, and that she even now inwardly expostulated with her destiny, which had led her up through five-and-twenty years of life without that youth. Though he and she had grown fast friends, though she and his wife had become almost like sisters, no word had ever passed her lips which could give any clue to the story of sorrow and hopelessness which had driven her forth from her home at twenty-two, a sad, unhopeful woman, and had first led her to them. That there was a story, he was persuaded; persuaded, too, that she went over it in her mind as she stood looking out of the window then, before she answered him—some story connected with her home in that green dale which he had never seen, but of which she had once or twice spoken, in

words which, though simple, had been full of life and fire.

At last her answer came :

'I will do as you wish, Dr. Wentworth. I will go to Ridgeford.'

In the joy and relief of his heart, he stepped forward and shook both her hands.

'I do thank you—from my heart I thank you. With you at its head, Ridgeford shall be the first place of its kind in England—that I swear!'

He laughed with satisfaction. Judith only looked very grave, and then he said :

'But have you no curiosity to know what my great and special reason was for wishing you to go?'

'What was it?'

'Just this. I don't want you to be lost to suffering humanity and the medical profession, whether as a member of it, or a servant of it. Once safe in that post, you are safe for life ; but, until you are installed there, I have a consuming dread, which haunts me like a

ghost, of your breaking away from us, and getting married.'

'You certainly need not fear that,' said Judith, after a moment's pause, as she looked at him. 'It is the one contingency in my life which I am absolutely certain will never occur. Therefore be reassured.'

'To think of you married,' pursued the fanatic, 'devoted to one miserable man and his tiresome family, is to think of something monstrous. Well, good-bye. You'll see my wife to-morrow, before setting off. And stay at home a month, while you have the chance.'

He wrung her hand again, and departed.





CHAPTER XI.

THE WAY NOT CLEAR.

ONCE more Judith alighted at the well-known station at Hawes, and was met, as of old, by mine host of the King's Arms at Yoresett, and driven home by him. It was the third holiday she had had since first going to her work, but it was now more than a year since she had last been at home. To Judith these home-comings had their terror as well as their joy. Her love of her home, and of every spot of ground for miles around it, was a thing of a deep and ineradicable growth. Therefore there was always a certain delight in returning and be-

holding the familiar scenes and objects. But the desolation within was so great as almost entirely to counterbalance this joy. Since she had left home no word of leaving Yoresett had ever been spoken either by Delphine or by Mrs. Conisbrough. Each time that she returned it seemed to Judith that Delphine looked more shadowy, more exquisitely lovely, and more unearthly in her fragility. She was particularly struck with that look when she alighted on this occasion, and her sister came forward to welcome her. She formed a striking contrast to the splendid handsomeness of the youngest girl, now a tall and well-developed young lady of nineteen, as full of health, of life, and fire, as Delphine seemed shadowy and ghost-like in her beauty.

They welcomed her, Delphine very quietly, Rhoda enthusiastically. Judith had been visited often by a torturing suspicion that Delphine had never regarded her with the same feelings since that afternoon when she had found her in her painting-room, and had

told her old Martha Paley's tale. She fancied that Delphine regarded her sometimes with a strangely cold and alien glance, as if she suddenly recollected the mortal blow which Judith's hand had dealt to her happiness, and shivered and feared at the remembrance of it. The idea was almost intolerably painful, and she had never dared to put it into words. Where would have been the use? Delphine could not order her feelings and expression to be exactly that which was most pleasing to others.

Rhoda's cry now, as of old, was for news.

'What's your news, Judith? Surely you have some news?'

'Yes, I have, this time. But I shall not tell it you till I can tell it to mamma as well.'

'She is upstairs,' observed Delphine, 'but I fancy she will come down before long.'

They were in the parlour, and while Judith sat down and rested Delphine remarked:

'Judith, I think you will find mamma looking a good deal changed—I am afraid so. But don't seem to notice it, for there is nothing she dislikes more than for people to make remarks about it.'

'Why—do you mean she is ill, or—or failing, or anything?'

'I don't know, I am sure. She is very much changed. I can hardly describe to you in what way.'

She had scarcely finished speaking when Mrs. Conisbrough came into the room. Judith could not but agree with her sister's words. Their mother looked haggard, worn, and aged, and all these things had greatly increased upon her since Judith had last seen her.

Judith advanced, and greeted her with tender affection; but Mrs. Conisbrough received her coldly. It was one of the girl's heaviest trials, and one which, she felt, was not likely to cease while her mother lived.

Judith had been desperate when she had

taken that extreme step of speaking to her mother of the wrong she had done; but she had spoken of it, and as a simple matter of fact Mrs. Conisbrough had never forgiven her for it. They had never been very sympathetic, but that episode had created a breach between them—not very noticeable on the outside, but deep—deep as the respective bases of their own characters.

Judith always felt as if she hardly dared lift her eyes to her mother's face. She always felt as if she were the culprit, and as if she were for ever labouring under the ban of a parent's heavy and merited displeasure. These feelings are settled for us, and arise within us, not at the dictates of reason and justice, but in obedience to inherited traditions, whose beginning has its source somewhere in the dim vista of our ancestors' habits, countless generations back: in obedience, too, to certain instincts in our own individual natures. Such instincts as these it was which made Judith Conisbrough

morally cast ashes upon her own head for ever having dared to speak to her mother of her sin; which made her feel almost as if that mother were justified in treating her with the distant and ceremonious coldness which she had observed to her ever since the first moments of the silence with which she had received her daughter's words.

Delphine also knew the miserable secret, but it did not appear to have caused the same breach between her and her mother. Mrs. Conisbrough spoke almost genially to her, and called her 'my love!' It was three years, Judith reflected, her heart rent with anguish, since that term of endearment, or any like it, had been bestowed upon her. She waited until the evening meal was over, and they were all seated together in the familiar parlour. She had noticed her mother's slight and failing appetite, and how she turned away in distaste from almost everything they tried to tempt her with. Though it was July, there was a small fire,

and Mrs. Conisbrough took her place beside it when tea was over. Judith took her position on a stool at her mother's feet, and, clasping her hands on her knee, looked up into her face, and said :

'Mother, I have something to tell you.'

'Indeed,' was the listless reply.

'Yes. You know all about Dr. Wentworth now. You have often heard of him from me, and I am sure you have heard his praises sounded by the Mallesons.'

'Oh yes! I suppose he is a very great man. I know he seems to have the art of making people slave for him without giving them much remuneration.'

'It is not always he who decides what the remuneration shall be. He called upon me yesterday. He wants me to take a month's holiday instead of only a fortnight, and then he wants me to undertake a very serious responsibility.'

'Has he any thoughts of paying you for the responsibility ?'

'The payment is in the hands of a committee, and it is very liberal. He wants me to be the Matron of the new Hospital at Ridgeford, near Irkford.'

'You?' said Mrs. Conisbrough, looking at her curiously, as if she could not take the idea in. 'Matron of a hospital—and what did you say?'

'He begged me to go,' said Judith, looking into her mother's face with a great longing. 'He is to be the head of the council, and really the master of it all, and he promised to be my faithful friend if I undertook it. It is an almost terribly responsible post.'

'Ah, indeed! And pray, what did you decide? I should have felt myself too young and inexperienced had I been in your place,' said Mrs. Conisbrough, almost coldly; while Delphine, with a sudden rush of surprise and sympathy exclaimed:

'Why, Judith, it will be an immense work. It will want a woman of great power in every way—a woman like you, and I am sure I

think Dr. Wentworth hit upon the right person when he chose you for it.'

'He would not allow me to decline, or to urge any objections,' said Judith, turning to Delphine, almost choked with grief at the manner in which her news was received. Was it not the turning-point of her whole life? Did not her mother know well its full significance? And had she nothing warmer, nothing more sympathetic to say to it than this? 'I have had great difficulty in believing that I ought to accept it,' Judith went on, 'but at last I felt that I must at least try, and I accepted.'

She turned to her mother again, and said:

'The salary is a good one, mother; it is three hundred a year.'

'Dear me! That is certainly an improvement. The walk in life which you have chosen is not one which would have recommended itself to me; but, since you *have* chosen it, I congratulate you on being successful in it.'

Judith said no more. She had communicated the news somewhat as one does a disagreeable duty, but she had not expected it to be received thus. When Mrs. Conisbrough retired, which she did early, Delphine went with her to her room, and thus Judith and Rhoda were left alone.

'Why didn't you tell me about mamma?' said the former. 'She ought to have a first-rate physician to see her, even if we had to send to London for him. I am perfectly certain she is very seriously out of health. You should not have kept me in the dark, Rhoda.'

'It was Delphine, Judith. She said you had care and trouble enough, without having that added to them. Poor Del! She has been longing for you to come. She has had a dismal time of it with mamma.'

'Why, has mamma been cross?'

'Dreadful! She can't help it, poor thing. I can often see that it is not because she feels unkind or spiteful, but because she is miser-

able. Uncle Aglionby has a great deal to answer for, and I hope he *will* have to answer for it. I don't despair of *seeing* him brought to account sometime. Meantime it is not very agreeable for us here below. I don't know how Delphine bears it as she does, but mamma has never let her alone about having refused Mr. Danesdale.'

'Rhoda!'

'You cannot imagine what I have felt sometimes, when I have had to watch Delphine being literally tortured. Of course I don't pretend to understand the facts of the case, or why Delphine refused Mr. Danesdale, but I do know that she adores him, and that her heart is breaking.'

'Oh, Rhoda, it is what I have feared, and what has haunted me again and again, while I have been away. She is one of those who never complain, and *never* get over a thing of that kind. Poor child! But it must not go on. Does she ever see Mr. Danesdale?'

'Oh, at church, sometimes. She never

looks at him, but I have seen him look at her, with a look I cannot understand. I don't think she has ever spoken to him since that ball you went to. Sir Gabriel has not been well, and they say he is very anxious for Mr. Danesdale to be married, and that he will be soon.'

'Ah! To whom? Do they say that too?'

'Some people talk about Miss Bird. They say she has refused no end of men for his sake.'

'I don't believe it. She is a sweet little thing, but I don't believe she cares, or ever did care, a straw for Randulf Danesdale. No; depend upon it, if he marries, to oblige his father, it will be a different sort of woman—one who will put as little heart into the affair as he will himself. *Poor* fellow!'

'I know nothing about that. I know they say he is going to be married, and if he does marry I believe it will kill Delphine. She says he is quite right—she told mamma so. She says he must marry, but it will kill her all the same.'

Judith sat silent, her heart wrung; and Rhoda, who was, for her, exceedingly subdued, did not enlarge upon the situation. Presently Delphine came downstairs, looking, as Judith's eyes, sharpened by pity and fear, observed, almost transparent in her fragility.

The girls talked about their mother, and Judith found her sisters as anxious as herself to have advice. She said she should write to Dr. Wentworth, and ask his advice, and request him to tell them whom they ought to consult.

Later, when Judith and Rhoda again happened to be alone, the latter said:

'Mr. Danesdale has been abroad for ever so long with Mr. Aglionby.'

'Has he?'

'Yes; they are most tremendous friends. People call them Orestes and Pylades. Whenever Mr. Aglionby is at home, Mr. Danesdale is with him, or he is with Mr. Danesdale. But our cousin doesn't spend much of his time at Scar Foot. He's there just now

though, and nobody says anything about his getting married. His aunt lives with him and keeps house for him, and some people seem to like him. The Mallesons do. I've seen him there once or twice, and he is fearfully grave and dignified. I can't hate the man, though I should like to.'

Judith was saved from the necessity of a reply, by the entrance of Delphine. She pondered upon all she had heard, and in her mind the situation resolved itself into this, that her mother would not live long. Her eye, now practised in reading the signs of most kinds of disease, beheld the beginning of the end, written very plainly in Mrs. Conisbrough's appearance and expression. With her would die her secret and all chance of its becoming known; and for them, in their youth and loneliness, would remain nothing in the world but to work out, as best they could, the sad behest:

'Work, be unhappy, but bear life, my son.'

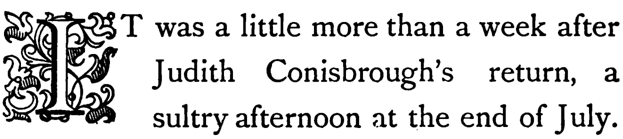
For herself she could answer. She felt within her strength to meet her fate and master it. She thought she could answer for Rhoda too. No doubt the struggles would be desperate, the torture keen, before conquest was hers, but it would be hers in the end, she felt sure. But for her best-beloved, to whom she was powerless to give hope on the one hand, or callous indifference on the other, or, yet again, the resolve that rides triumphant over death—what remained for her? She dared not attempt to look forward or to answer the question honestly. She had resolution to face most possibilities, but not the one which carried Delphine out of her life.





CHAPTER XII.

'WAIT TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME.'



IT was a little more than a week after Judith Conisbrough's return, a sultry afternoon at the end of July. At Scar Foot all was quiet, except the rooks which wheeled and cawed noisily in the trees. The windows were all open, now that the sun had left the house, after being closed all morning, with the blinds down, to keep the said sun out. In the dining-room the luncheon-table was spread, with Aglionby and Mrs. Bryce at the head and foot of it, and Randulf, as guest, at one side.

The meal was just over, as Aglionby observed :

'You look tired, aunt. Is it the heat?'

'I suppose so. I think it is going to thunder. I generally know by my nerves when it is, and they prognosticate a storm now.'

'Just like Philippa,' said Randulf, with the air of one who has made an interesting discovery. 'She says she always knows when there's going to be a thunderstorm.'

'You don't look too brilliant yourself, Bernard,' observed Mrs. Bryce, laughing. 'Does he, Mr. Danesdale?'

'N—no. A bit thundery (like the weather), as usual, when he doesn't get enough of his own way. I should take no notice of him: he'll come round.'

'Who would not, after hearing such soothing comments passed upon his looks and the causes of them?' said Aglionby, who had been looking, as a matter of fact, pale, but darkly handsome, as usual, but across whose gravity there now flashed a smile, transforming his whole face. He pushed his chair

away as he spoke, and opened the door for Mrs. Bryce, saying:

'I really would go and rest, aunt, if I were you; or you'll be having one of your headaches.'

'I think I shall,' said Mrs. Bryce, going away.

'Where shall we go?' said Aglionby to his friend, 'for I'm at your disposal this afternoon.'

'Wherever it's coolest, and wherever it takes least exertion to get to,' was the characteristic reply.

'That's my den, then, across the house-place,' said Bernard, leading the way.

Randulf flung himself at full-length on a settee, and began, with the usual promptitude of action which contrasted so oddly with his drawling speech:

'Can you guess what it is I want to have over with you?'

'I suppose you are really thinking of getting married?'

'Yes, more's the bad luck, I am. I want you to give me some advice as to a suitable lady.'

'Me—surely you know best yourself.'

'Not I! My father is anything but well, you know, so he wasn't sorry for the excuse to leave town, and I don't think Philippa minded much. She has got a fancy that he is really failing, and I can see that he is just miserable till I decide upon something. He has sacrificed an awful lot for me; it is right that I should sacrifice something for him, so I told him I was willing to oblige him.'

'You told me at the time' (they both seemed to know what this rather vague expression meant) 'that he had told you to wait five years if you liked, but that you should do nothing of the sort.'

'Ah! I fancied my powers of getting over troubles were greater than they turn out to be. To make a clean breast of it, I care for that girl as much to-day as I did the day she

refused me—ay, and ten times more. I never shall care for another girl. My father says I talk cynically. Philippa, poor lass! turns her eyes towards heaven, and says she wonders how I *can*'—he laughed. 'She knows nothing about it. I am going to do it, but I'll never utter one word of pretence in the whole matter; I won't have "love" so much as mentioned. Therefore, my dear fellow, think of money, beauty, rank, cleverness, discretion, dignity, suitability, as much as you please; but for God's sake don't ask me to marry any girl whom I should have to pretend to care for, or who would pretend to care for me.'

'You talk as if I could lay my finger on the proper person at a moment's notice.'

'So you can, if you choose.'

'It's plain to see, from that, that you know perfectly well who is to be the victim of your despair, or the accomplice of your heartless project—whichever you like to call it. You mean Miss Askam, I suppose?'

'Well, she is well known to be the most

heartless, ambitious, worldly, self-seeking little monkey in the North Riding.'

'So I believe.'

'I thought of her instantly. But I had a scruple.'

'What was that?'

'Some one told me that you admired her.'

'I? Good Lord! Set your mind at rest, I beg; and if my services can be of the least help to you in the matter, command them. But I would like to give you a word of advice.'

'Well?'

'You would do better to look for some one else. I know that Dorothy Askam appears to be exactly what you have said. I don't believe she knows she has got a heart, but I also believe that if you made love to her, she would find it out, and that very soon.'

'Then she won't do. I must have some one to whom I shall not have to pretend even to make love. Make love!' he added,

bitterly. 'Make *love!* after seeing *her* last Sunday, and her drooping looks! I know this—I must not see her again if I can help before it's all over, or I shall funk it at the very last. It's hideous—hideous! I've often heard of girls selling themselves, and seen them do it, too, with smiling faces, and take any amount of spooning from fellows whom they may almost loathe; but I never knew what it must feel like till now.'

'Poor innocent victim! Poor unsheltered lamb!' was the soothing reply.

'Ah, your sympathy was always of the robust kind,' grumbled Randulf. 'A stroke on the back with one hand, and a cut of the whip from the other.'

'If you drop the whip for long in commiserating either your friend's grief or your own, you find yourself wreathed with weeping willow before long, and blown out with sentimental sighs,' retorted Aglionby.

'Well, will you think it over, and let me have the result of your meditations?'

'I will.'

'Do you ever hear anything of Miss Vane "that was," as they say, now?'

'I have seen her more than once since her marriage, and her husband says that sometimes she tells him what prospects she gave up for his sake. I go over and see them when I want to be reminded that once upon a time I was made a great fool of, all the time that I thought myself a person of the greatest penetration.'

A pause ensued, which was broken by the entrance of a servant with a note for Aglionby.

'The messenger is waiting for an answer, sir.'

He read it through—it was very short—got up, and, without making the slightest observation, scribbled off an answer as short as the note, gave it to the servant, and said:

'Tell William I want Egyptian—he must saddle him at once.'

'Are you mad?' murmured Randulf. 'To ride—on an afternoon like this.'

'It's a summons,' said Aglionby, 'which may mean a great deal, or perhaps nothing at all. Hark to me, Randulf. Establish yourself here for the night. I can't tell when I may return, but it will be sometime to-night, and I may have news for you.'

'News—about what?'

'Don't press me! It is but a chance. But stay—to oblige me, old fellow. And, for Heaven's sake, don't write and propose to Miss Askam, or Miss Anyone, while I am out.'

Randulf shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, to please you. And what am I to say to Mrs. Bryce?'

'That I was called off on business, and will be back to-night.'

When Egyptian was announced as being ready, Randulf Danesdale, despite the heat, followed his friend into the yard, and stood bareheaded while he mounted, followed him to the gate, and leaned upon it long, watching

while Aglionby rode out in the blazing sun, along the road to Yoresett.

'Perhaps the riddle is going to be solved at last,' he said to himself, as he returned to the house.





CHAPTER XIII.

CONFESSION, OR EXPLANATION ?

AGLIONBY rode swiftly under the scorching sun, along the high, wild road to Yoresett. He went up the village street, and dismounted at the inn, where it was customary for the visitors of all degrees to leave their horses while they transacted their business in the town, and then he walked down the street again to Yoresett House, pulled the bell, and asked to see Mrs. Conisbrough.

The servant seemed to understand that he was expected, for she said 'Yes, sir,' with some alacrity, and admitted him at once,

ushering him into the parlour at the left hand of the hall—the one room of that house which he had ever been in. The light in it was somewhat dim after the blaze of sunshine outside, for the blinds were half-down, and Bernard, as he entered and looked around him, appeared very tall and pale, and rather gaunt, as he had grown to look of late. He had deluded himself lately into the idea that he was 'getting over' his disappointment about Judith, and that he was becoming reconciled to the position to which she had relegated him ; but he was mistaken, as this afternoon and its occurrences had made him feel. The mere knowledge that Judith was at home, that he might meet and see her, had excited him ; he could have echoed, with regard to her, all that Randulf had said about Delphine. Then Mrs. Conisbrough's note coming had made the emotion deeper, and, as it were, given a significance to their conversation.

He found Mrs. Conisbrough alone, and he

was shocked to see what an invalid, what a wreck she had become. She leaned back in her chair, with a white fleecy shawl round her shoulders, and close beside a small fire, even on this fiery July afternoon. Her cheeks were wasted; her eyes were hollow. He had not Judith's practical experience to go upon, but he instinctively felt that he was in the presence of one whose feet were hastening to her grave; whose spirit must soon say farewell to this life; to its griefs and joys, and hopes and fears. She looked at him long and steadily, and in silence. There was an expression upon her face which he did not quite understand—a look of coldness, of something like defiance. He laid down his hat, bent over her, and said:

'You sent for me, Mrs. Conisbrough.'

'Yes. I happen to be quite alone to-day, and as I felt a little stronger and wished to speak to you, I sent for you. I hope I have not inconvenienced you.'

'Your summons would have been obeyed

at whatever inconvenience, but, as it happens, it caused me none at all.'

'Pray be seated, Mr. Aglionby. We have not seen much of you since my uncle's death. It is long since I even saw you. I have been a great invalid of late, and have not left my house for many months.'

'I heard you had been in ill-health, and was sorry to learn it. I hope there is no caùse for any real uneasiness.'

'Not uneasiness,' she replied, with a peculiar smile, which chilled him, he knew not why. 'Oh no! I have nothing—it is long since I had anything left to be uneasy about. My daughters were uneasy, and last Sunday Judith's great friend Dr. Wentworth of Irkford came to see me.'

'Yes.'

'They did not tell me that he had come just for that; and they imagine that I did not know it. He professed to be staying at the Mallesons', and to have called casually to see Judith on some business; and then he

pretended to think me looking ill, and offered to examine my heart. They think I did not guess it all, and I have not undeceived them. He tired me dreadfully with his stethoscopes and instruments and poking about. I had no breath left in me when he had done. Such things are very trying in a heart-complaint.'

'They must be, indeed,' he said gravely. 'I hope——'

'Oh, he told them what I could have told him without all that fuss—that I have not long to live. I have known that for some time now, but they don't tell me, for fear of upsetting me.'

'It is a most natural feeling. And perhaps, after all——'

'Oh no!' She smiled in the same chill and weary manner. 'My days are numbered. I am going to die. Death has come to my bedside day and night, as I lay awake, and has taken my hand, and said to me, "Very soon I shall come and bid you arise, and

then you will have to get up and follow me, willing or unwilling." As it happens, I am willing—very willing. And knowing that—I have sent for you.'

Aglionby was dumb; and made no answer to her. She spoke with perfect calmness, but he realised the entire and unvarnished truth of all she said. There is no mistaking the mien of those who have, as she had, held daily communion with Death, and got to look upon him as a friend; to wait for his final coming with eagerness, and who have but one thing to reproach him with—that of not fulfilling his warnings with greater promptitude.

'I have something to say to you,' she went on presently. 'For a wonder the girls are all out. They are spending a long day with the Mallesons at Kumer in Swaledale. Mr. Malleson is taking the clergyman's duty there.'

'Yes, I have been to see them once or twice since they went.'

'They will not be back till quite late, as Mr. Malleson is going to drive them over. So I was free to carry out my purpose. I want to explain to you how it was that your grandfather left all his money to you instead of to me and my girls. You must have wondered about it many times, have you not?'

'Naturally. And perhaps you on your part have thought me grasping and hard, to——'

'No. I did once think so, and expressed an opinion of the kind, but Judith explained. She told me it was not your fault, but hers. She would not allow you to act differently.'

'She would not allow me to speak to you, and I obeyed her.'

'Yes, I know. It is the fashion now to make all your confidences to strangers, and to obey anyone rather than your parents. And yet, had you come to me, *I* could have explained it all, as no one else can. In order

to make you understand, I shall have to go back a long way, but I will be as quick as I can about it. I was left an orphan very early, and almost penniless too. I was brought up by my uncle at Scar Foot, with my cousin Ralph, your father. If my uncle had had a daughter, he would have expected blind obedience from her; so you may imagine what he exacted from me, a niece, and his dependent. He did not mean to be unkind, but no power on earth would ever have convinced him that he did not know people's wants, and wishes too, far better than they did themselves.

'As a rule I managed to get on with him, but I was an Aglionby as well as he—his sister's child—and I had some of the Aglionby spirit in me. There were times when I revolted in secret, but I was afraid of him—I always have been afraid of brute force; what they call the superiority of sex.

'Sometimes I succeeded in gaining my own ends in opposition to his, but if I did it

was by means of subterfuge. I am not going to apologise for that, and I do not feel in the least ashamed of it. I read the other day that that "superiority of sex" argument must always be unanswerable in the hands of a coalheaver. Quite true; and the man who chooses to treat a woman to arguments of the coalheaver kind, transformed from the physical to the moral side, that man deserves to be cheated, and he may expect to be cheated. I cheated my uncle many a time, in order to obtain things which a generous-minded man would never have needed asking for. I am glad that I did it,' she added slowly, and with cold and concentrated bitterness, while Aglionby sat silent, astounded, and almost aghast at the psychological problem that was gradually being laid bare to him. 'I just explain this to you to show that with me to deceive him when he oppressed me beyond bounds with his tyranny, had grown into a habit, which I first excused to myself, then justified, and

presently realised that it required no justification—it was right. I cheated him as a matter of course, when I should have behaved with transparent honesty to anyone else.

'Ralph was better able to get his own way openly, but he had recourse to subterfuge many and many a time. Often and often have we combined to circumvent the plans of his father, when they were odious to us. We were very good friends, Ralph and I—brother and sister, you understand; but I cared more for him than he did for me, till the wretched day came on which my uncle took it into his head that we should be married.

'"No sooner said than done," was his motto. He told Ralph privately what he desired, and bade him propose to me. Ralph did not want me, and said so openly —which I did not know till later. It was the first time he had boldly opposed his father, and when he saw the storm of wrath that ensued, he said, by way of excuse, that

he was sure I did not wish it either, and that I would not have him if he asked me.

'Now, mark, when he wanted his own way, my uncle could flatter and dissimulate. It was not that he had thought we cared for each other, or that we had struck him as being exceedingly well suited to one another. He wished it, and it should be. He came to me, and said he had reason to think Ralph cared for me—would I marry him if he wished it? And then he painted the future —how he would provide for us, how one day Scar Foot was to be ours, and so on.

'Ralph was agreeable to me; I was tired to death of being treated as a child without will, or an idiot without reason. I foresaw freedom and independence, and an indulgent young husband, instead of a tyrannical old uncle. I said yes, I would consent. This news was communicated to Ralph, who, for all answer, said that he had given way in many things, but that, as to choosing a wife, he could do that for himself, and that he was

ushering him into the parlour at the left hand of the hall—the one room of that house which he had ever been in. The light in it was somewhat dim after the blaze of sunshine outside, for the blinds were half-down, and Bernard, as he entered and looked around him, appeared very tall and pale, and rather gaunt, as he had grown to look of late. He had deluded himself lately into the idea that he was 'getting over' his disappointment about Judith, and that he was becoming reconciled to the position to which she had relegated him ; but he was mistaken, as this afternoon and its occurrences had made him feel. The mere knowledge that Judith was at home, that he might meet and see her, had excited him ; he could have echoed, with regard to her, all that Randulf had said about Delphine. Then Mrs. Conisbrough's note coming had made the emotion deeper, and, as it were, given a significance to their conversation.

He found Mrs. Conisbrough alone, and he

was shocked to see what an invalid, what a wreck she had become. She leaned back in her chair, with a white fleecy shawl round her shoulders, and close beside a small fire, even on this fiery July afternoon. Her cheeks were wasted; her eyes were hollow. He had not Judith's practical experience to go upon, but he instinctively felt that he was in the presence of one whose feet were hastening to her grave; whose spirit must soon say farewell to this life; to its griefs and joys, and hopes and fears. She looked at him long and steadily, and in silence. There was an expression upon her face which he did not quite understand—a look of coldness, of something like defiance. He laid down his hat, bent over her, and said:

'You sent for me, Mrs. Conisbrough.'

'Yes. I happen to be quite alone to-day, and as I felt a little stronger and wished to speak to you, I sent for you. I hope I have not inconvenienced you.'

'Your summons would have been obeyed

at whatever inconvenience, but, as it happens, it caused me none at all.'

'Pray be seated, Mr. Aglionby. We have not seen much of you since my uncle's death. It is long since I even saw you. I have been a great invalid of late, and have not left my house for many months.'

'I heard you had been in ill-health, and was sorry to learn it. I hope there is no cause for any real uneasiness.'

'Not uneasiness,' she replied, with a peculiar smile, which chilled him, he knew not why. 'Oh no! I have nothing—it is long since I had anything left to be uneasy about. My daughters were uneasy, and last Sunday Judith's great friend Dr. Wentworth of Irkford came to see me.'

'Yes.'

'They did not tell me that he had come just for that; and they imagine that I did not know it. He professed to be staying at the Mallesons', and to have called casually to see Judith on some business; and then he

pretended to think me looking ill, and offered to examine my heart. They think I did not guess it all, and I have not undeceived them. He tired me dreadfully with his stethoscopes and instruments and poking about. I had no breath left in me when he had done. Such things are very trying in a heart-complaint.'

'They must be, indeed,' he said gravely. 'I hope——'

'Oh, he told them what I could have told him without all that fuss—that I have not long to live. I have known that for some time now, but they don't tell me, for fear of upsetting me.'

'It is a most natural feeling. And perhaps, after all——'

'Oh no!' She smiled in the same chill and weary manner. 'My days are numbered. I am going to die. Death has come to my bedside day and night, as I lay awake, and has taken my hand, and said to me, "Very soon I shall come and bid you arise, and

to make you understand, I shall have to go back a long way, but I will be as quick as I can about it. I was left an orphan very early, and almost penniless too. I was brought up by my uncle at Scar Foot, with my cousin Ralph, your father. If my uncle had had a daughter, he would have expected blind obedience from her; so you may imagine what he exacted from me, a niece, and his dependent. He did not mean to be unkind, but no power on earth would ever have convinced him that he did not know people's wants, and wishes too, far better than they did themselves.

'As a rule I managed to get on with him, but I was an Aglionby as well as he—his sister's child—and I had some of the Aglionby spirit in me. There were times when I revolted in secret, but I was afraid of him—I always have been afraid of brute force; what they call the superiority of sex.

'Sometimes I succeeded in gaining my own ends in opposition to his, but if I did it

was by means of subterfuge. I am not going to apologise for that, and I do not feel in the least ashamed of it. I read the other day that that "superiority of sex" argument must always be unanswerable in the hands of a coalheaver. Quite true; and the man who chooses to treat a woman to arguments of the coalheaver kind, transformed from the physical to the moral side, that man deserves to be cheated, and he may expect to be cheated. I cheated my uncle many a time, in order to obtain things which a generous-minded man would never have needed asking for. I am glad that I did it,' she added slowly, and with cold and concentrated bitterness, while Aglionby sat silent, astounded, and almost aghast at the psychological problem that was gradually being laid bare to him. 'I just explain this to you to show that with me to deceive him when he oppressed me beyond bounds with his tyranny, had grown into a habit, which I first excused to myself, then justified, and

and which had been earned hardly enough, in all conscience, if they had been ten times as great.

'What a fool he was! What a great, selfish, blundering fool! Men *are* fools. The great mystery to me is how they, with their consummate stupidity, have yet managed to gain the mastery over us. Brute force again, I suppose, is the only answer to the question. I went to Irkford. I had to take my nurse and baby with me, of course. My commission was to tell your mother that your grandfather was wishful to provide for you as if nothing had ever happened, and, finally, to leave you his estate and property, as he would have done in the natural course of things. The conditions attached to this proposal were, that you were to live with your grandfather eleven months in the year, and one with your mother, and that no direct communication was to pass between your mother and your grandfather. On these conditions she also was to be suitably provided for, and was to

be free as air to follow her own course in the future ; even to marry again, if she chose to do so.

'You perceive that this proposal was susceptible of being made either openly insulting, or, at any rate, fair and politic, just according to the way in which the messenger delivered it. I was in no mood to make it smooth, or to deliver it pleasantly. When I saw your mother, also, I am bound to say that she received me with a coldness and a haughtiness which were by no means conciliating. Smarting under my wrongs and insults, and indignant at her reception of me, I felt a savage pleasure in delivering the message as rudely and abruptly as possible. I did not for a moment suppose she would refuse my overtures. I told her that Mr. Aglionby, of Scar Foot, wished to have the guardianship of his grandchild, and that he was willing to provide for him on condition that the mother contented herself with seeing him one month in each year, and that she never, under any

pretext, sought a personal interview with Mr. Aglionby, or wrote a direct letter to him. All this I told her as if it were a matter of the profoundest indifference to me what course she took, or what became of her and the child.

'You will please understand that I was faithful to the letter of my instructions. I said exactly what my uncle had said, but I said it in a certain way. The effect of it surprised me. Your mother rose up and almost ordered me from her house.

'"Tell him," she said, "that I would rather beg my bread and my child's bread through the streets, than hand him into the power of a man who can behave as he has done. He ruined his own son; he shall not ruin mine; nor shall he insult me with impunity. And you," she added, "how could you, a woman, a mother with a baby at her breast, come and offer such terms to another mother, one who is widowed; one who has *nothing* but her child to make

this life worth a moment's purchase to her?"

'I shrugged my shoulders—how was it likely that she could understand? I took her answer: I came away; I left Irkford. I was not sorry that she had answered me as she had done: it would be a blow to my uncle; it would humble his pride. They would both have to humble themselves—the proud man and the proud woman too, if they were ever to come to anything like an understanding. I had been staying at Scar Foot, when I had been sent to Irkford. I returned straight there.

'Your mother had said to me, that she was not so utterly destitute as I seemed to imagine; that she yet possessed a relation or two who, even if she died, would not let her child starve. I told this to your grandfather: I said her relations would provide for you rather than that you should get into his hands, and I was happy in saying it.'

(Here Mrs. Conisbrough related the scene

which had taken place on her return to Scar Foot, and her narrative agreed in every particular with that given by old Martha to Judith, except that she omitted to mention her own excessive agitation at the time.)

'At times, after that,' she went on, 'I used to amuse myself by thinking that I, if I chose, could bring about a reconciliation—I alone. But I am not so sure now that I should have been able to do so, had I tried. Then my own troubles began, and I gave over thinking of you and your mother.

'Soon after Rhoda's birth, my husband died, and with him, of course, the greater part of my means of subsistence. I was more in the power of my uncle than ever, and that fact hardened me as nothing else could have done. Sordid, grinding poverty oppressed me; forced self-interest ruthlessly to the front, and induced me to keep silence.

'All went well—what I called well—for twenty-two years. Just fancy what a length of time in which to live as I did! But you

cannot understand it—men never can understand women's lives and women's trials—it would be as absurd to ask the sea to understand a stagnant pond. Then my uncle went to Irkford, three years ago—simply on a matter of amusement—to attend a political meeting in a town he had once known, and took my daughter Judith with him, "for a change," he said. She had always been his favourite—so far as he had a favourite.

'The day after his return, he came here, and told me that he had seen you, and how deceived he must have been about those relations of your mother's. I knew that my day was over. I do not say I knew I was found out—for I do not see that there was anything to be found out. I had told no lies; I had kept to the letter of my message. But my day was over, of course. It was my ill-luck. I have been an unlucky woman all my life. He sent for Mr. Whaley that night, and made the will which left everything to you. As to the rest, you know it all!'

She stopped.

Aglionby, his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands, was intently staring at her, honestly but vainly endeavouring to put himself in her place. He did not speak, and by-and-by she went on:

'Different reasons make me wish to tell you this. Not that I am afraid of anything that you can do to me. Do not suppose it for a moment! Partly, I wish you to understand that it was not out of any sudden affection for you that your grandfather altered his will—it was because I had been too true to him, and he wished to be revenged upon me. He was true to his character to the last: "the ruling passion strong in death" was exemplified in him, if ever it was in anyone.

'When you leaned over the table that day at Scar Foot, and looked at me, you were so strangely like your mother, and your father, and even your grandfather, that I was frightened: it was as if I had seen three ghosts at

once—spectres that I hated, all of them. I could not bear it.

'Next, there is one person who in life believed in me, and was good to me—good as a kind angel. If he had stayed with me, I should have been a better woman: I should have confessed my wrong, and he would have forgiven me. It is he alone whom I am afraid to meet. That one is my husband.

'I fear neither my uncle, nor my cousin, nor my cousin's wife. They made me what I was. But I fear lest my husband should turn away from me. You must know that he was the purest and best and gentlest man that ever lived—he was like Delphine, only a man. I am in hopes that his spirit hears me now, and that when I die it is he who will be sent to lead me into the next life—whatever that may be. Therefore, because I feel that he would approve of it, I say, will you forgive me? I shall soon be out of the way. Perhaps that may make it easier to you.'

'But your daughters—do you not see that it is they whom you have injured irreparably?' he said, almost breathlessly.

'My daughters,' said Mrs. Conisbrough, her face hardening, 'have behaved unnaturally. They condemned me unheard—at least Judith did; and Delphine believes in Judith as if she were God—so she condemns me too. They do not know what you know now, yet they condemned me. That is all I have to say about them. I was born to be wretched, and most faithfully has my destiny been carried out.'

Aglionby started up, and began to pace about the room, distracted how to answer her. He wanted, with the instinct of a reasoning animal, to account for her conduct; to assign some central motive—some ruling idea as the origin and motive-power of her actions during her life. He could find none. He had yet to learn that Mrs. Conisbrough, like many another woman and man who sins, sinned very greatly in consequence of having

no ruling motive in her life. That 'commanding voice, which it is our truest life to hear and to obey,' had been absent with her; as it is with millions of her fellow-creatures, Christians and sceptics alike.

Ruling motives are not so common as the romance-writer in general would have us believe. It would be much easier correctly to portray human nature, and what the author of 'Caleb Williams' calls, 'things as they are,' if they were. A man or woman with a ruling motive, a supreme passion regulating all his actions, is a fine conception. Provide the ruling motive: let it be good or bad, according as the romance-writer feels well and cheerful, or bilious and gloomy; only make quite sure that all else is well-subordinated to it, and hey, presto! your character is bare before you, as plain to read as the roads and mountains in an ordnance map, and you have nothing to do but take a clean sheet of paper, and a new pen, so that your flow of language be not interrupted by

scratches and splutterings, and write it down. A pleasing idea, for lessening the toils of the scribbler, but unfortunately one which is simply useless to the artist: since chaos, oftener than order, rules the majority of commonplace lives, anarchy, not law, is God. A high emotion here, a low one there, predominates; now the soul draws us upwards; now the senses drag us downwards—it is one long game of pull devil, pull baker, between the higher and the lower nature: sometimes the one has it, sometimes the other; seldom does either hold undisputed sway for long. The 'ruling idea' retires discreetly into the background, and places itself modestly upon the golden throne which many generations of enthusiastic but deluded story-tellers have combined to erect for it. The 'ruling motive' is, so far as the millions are concerned, a beautiful figment of the imagination: perhaps, in the case of some scores, or more probably tens, it may become a reality, to be embraced and obeyed.

Aglionby, with the ingenuousness of youth, for he was young, and he was ingenuous, as surely all his actions heretofore must have proved—Aglionby, then, had a vague, youthful belief in the 'ruling motive' hypothesis. The flat contradiction given by Mrs. Conisbrough to his preconceived notions staggered him. We often are staggered when we are confronted in others by the results of principles of which we are ourselves living illustrations.

'Well,' she suddenly broke in upon him, 'you have come off the victor, as I might have known you would, you being a man, and I a woman. It is always the way. Since you have conquered, surely you can manage to forgive.'

He stopped abruptly before her.

'No, I cannot,' he said, curtly. 'At least, not yet. I must first know something which *you* cannot tell me, however much you desired to do so. You must excuse me a short time. I have heard you; you seem only able to see

things from one point of view ; but you must allow me to see them from one or two others. I trust I may be able to extend my hand to you this very night, and say, "Let us forgive and forget." I hope so. But there *is* a contingency—if it occurs, I cannot—no, by heaven, I cannot and will not forgive you!'

The answer was not what she had expected. The idea that perhaps this forgiveness which she had, as it were, rather demanded than begged, might be refused after all, startled and alarmed her.

'Oh, you must, you must,' she exclaimed, in agitation. 'You must not let me die unforgiven. If I did wrong for it, see how I have suffered—every day, every hour of my life has been a privation, a disappointment, a mortification.'

'That may be,' he said coldly. 'But until I am satisfied on one point, I cannot promise forgiveness. I am human—I am flesh and blood, and not made of wood, or cast-iron. I never even pretended to think any

man ought to offer his right cheek to him that has smitten his left. You shall know to-night—before the sun sets, I hope. There are others whom you have wronged even more than you have wronged me; and it is to them I must first appeal. But you shall know before to-day is out.'

He picked up his hat, walked out of the room, and left her.





CHAPTER XIV.

ON YORESETT MOOR.

JUDITH had gone unwillingly with her sisters to the Mallesons' temporary home in Swaledale. They had driven there. It was only some four miles distant from Yoresett, but the road was a mountain-pass, going first sheer up, and then sheer down a steep hill, with glorious views of moor and mountain on every side. The Mallesons made much of the girls, and were heartily delighted to see them. Delphine and Rhoda were pleased and touched by this kindness; so, too, was Judith, but she could not shake off the weight which op-

pressed her spirits. The cause of her unhappiness was not far to seek. It was the wretched breach between herself and her mother which took the pleasure from her life at this time. That breach had only grown deeper during the week she had been at home, certainly not from any wish of Judith's. But all her submissiveness, all her eager wish to please, only seemed to irritate Mrs. Conisbrough further and further against her daughter. She had parted from her with marked coldness that morning, and the remembrance of her alien glance, and of the hard and unfriendly ring of her voice, lay like a leaden weight at Judith's heart.

All morning the sense of unhappiness had been growing, until the idea suddenly darted into her mind that her mother was alone this afternoon. What if she were to return home, and taking advantage of this solitude, were to plead for forgiveness—though for what fault she could not have told—were to assure her mother of her deep

and unchanging love for her, and beg her no longer to be so cold and severe with her?

The desire to act upon this impulse became stronger and stronger, until at last, as she and Mr. Malleson, to whom she had been talking about Dr. Wentworth, sat alone upon a garden-bench when lunch was over, and while her sisters and Mrs. Malleson were equipping the children for a donkey-ride to a well-known waterfall, where they were to have a gipsy-tea, she suddenly said:

'Mr. Malleson, will you do me a favour?'

'With pleasure, if I can.'

'Let me go home now, and if the others seem surprised, say I did not like to leave mamma alone all day, but that they are not on any account to follow me—will you?'

'But, my dear Miss Conisbrough, the heat, the long walk over the hill——'

'I am as strong as ever I was. Listen, Mr. Malleson. I have offended my mother; I want to make my peace with her. I must

have behaved wrongly in some way—been too proud, or too stiff, or something. She will forgive me, I am sure, if I beg her to do so. She is alone, and I shall have the better chance.'

'In that case, go, by all means, and take my best wishes with you. I will explain what is necessary to the others.'

'Thank you—thank you,' said she, shaking his hand, and adding, with a rather feeble smile, 'I will come to see you and Paulina again before I return to Irkford. You may depend upon me.'

With which, picking up her sunshade, she left him, and set her face towards the hill, in the direction of Danesdale. Her heart was beating with one of those sudden terrors which assail us sometimes, without much cause, perhaps, but none the less potently on that account.

Dr. Wentworth had said her mother was not likely to die at once, or even very suddenly; but, he had added, she might dc

so : there was always the possibility of such a thing.

Judith wondered almost wildly why they had consented all to leave her. Who knew what might happen during their absence? It was just at such times that things—by which she meant calamities—so often did happen. And at any rate she must make an effort to put an end to this unnatural hostility between herself and her mother. If the latter were to die without having forgiven her—her heart came to her throat at the mere idea of it.

It had been nearly four when she left the Mallesons' house. The climb to the top of the ridge from Swaledale was a steep one. Then came a rough but more level road, where the moors spread around far and wide, and then the path quickly descended again into Danesdale, and being directly above the town, was known thereabouts as Yoresett Moor, or Common.

She met not a soul as she went up the hill —slowly, in spite of her heart's eagerness;

she met not a soul, and she heard scarce a sound, save the melancholy call of the curlew, or the full-throated song of a lark. The shooting season had not begun, so that not even the crack of a sportsman's gun disturbed the quietness. It was almost awfully grand and beautiful to see the sweeping wastes of purple moor—to mark one huge hill-top after another raise itself into the blue ether, each like a great incorporate hymn of praise to That which had planned them 'or ever the world began.'

Judith was not a lover of towns, and it was therefore natural to her mind to institute a comparison—to think how miserable, beside this vast and imposing stillness and calm of eternal nature, appeared the clatter and rattle and bustle of little, fussy, noisy man, with his railways and his commerce, clamouring for his rights, and cheating his fellows, inspired apparently with the ardent desire to resemble a pike as nearly as possible, and to find the rest of his race convenient gudgeons.

It all came home to Judith, whose love for *this* rather than for *that* was innate and hereditary, but it made less impression upon her than usual, because of the fever of her heart and the preoccupation of her mind.

She at last arrived almost at the top of the steep ascent. Here the view on either side was interrupted by high crags of grey limestone rock, rent and torn and tossed, while the herbage could scarce find a place amidst the chaos of huge stones and boulders which lay up and down, like the balls with which giants or demons had been playing some Titanic game. By looking back she could see down into dark Swaledale, from which she had ascended. Many hundreds of feet it lay below her, and looked like a narrow little passage enough, walled in by big black fells, some of the 'greate hilles where they dygge leade,' spoken of by the chronicler, while the 'right noble ryuer, the Swale,' forced its way boisterously through it. This prospect was to the left. To the right there was so

abrupt a turn in the road that only a few yards of it were to be seen, and then the crags of limestone shut it in. Just here was the green and mossy source of a little dancing rivulet, which came trickling out of the rock with a murmur of endless, low-voiced contentment, at having come safely from the dark womb that bore it, and being free to run into the gay sunshine and over the broad moors.

It was at this point that Judith perforce sat down to rest a few moments before taking her way down the hill to Yoresett, a descent of two full miles, which was almost more fatiguing than the ascent. The great boulders strewed about offered an abundance of resting-places. She seated herself upon one of them, fixed her eyes upon the little murmuring rill, and waited awhile. The sun had gone behind one of the crags; a fresh, delicate breeze played upon her face; she was literally enjoying the shelter of 'a great rock in a weary land.'



CHAPTER XI.

THE WAY NOT CLEAR.

ONCE more Judith alighted at the well-known station at Hawes, and was met, as of old, by mine host of the King's Arms at Yoresett, and driven home by him. It was the third holiday she had had since first going to her work, but it was now more than a year since she had last been at home. To Judith these home-comings had their terror as well as their joy. Her love of her home, and of every spot of ground for miles around it, was a thing of a deep and ineradicable growth. Therefore there was always a certain delight in returning and be-

holding the familiar scenes and objects. But the desolation within was so great as almost entirely to counterbalance this joy. Since she had left home no word of leaving Yoresett had ever been spoken either by Delphine or by Mrs. Conisbrough. Each time that she returned it seemed to Judith that Delphine looked more shadowy, more exquisitely lovely, and more unearthly in her fragility. She was particularly struck with that look when she alighted on this occasion, and her sister came forward to welcome her. She formed a striking contrast to the splendid handsomeness of the youngest girl, now a tall and well-developed young lady of nineteen, as full of health, of life, and fire, as Delphine seemed shadowy and ghost-like in her beauty.

They welcomed her, Delphine very quietly, Rhoda enthusiastically. Judith had been visited often by a torturing suspicion that Delphine had never regarded her with the same feelings since that afternoon when she had found her in her painting-room, and had

told her old Martha Paley's tale. She fancied that Delphine regarded her sometimes with a strangely cold and alien glance, as if she suddenly recollected the mortal blow which Judith's hand had dealt to her happiness, and shivered and feared at the remembrance of it. The idea was almost intolerably painful, and she had never dared to put it into words. Where would have been the use? Delphine could not order her feelings and expression to be exactly that which was most pleasing to others.

Rhoda's cry now, as of old, was for news.

'What's your news, Judith? Surely you have some news?'

'Yes, I have, this time. But I shall not tell it you till I can tell it to mamma as well.'

'She is upstairs,' observed Delphine, 'but I fancy she will come down before long.'

They were in the parlour, and while Judith sat down and rested Delphine remarked:

'Judith, I think you will find mamma looking a good deal changed—I am afraid so. But don't seem to notice it, for there is nothing she dislikes more than for people to make remarks about it.'

'Why—do you mean she is ill, or—or failing, or anything?'

'I don't know, I am sure. She is very much changed. I can hardly describe to you in what way.'

She had scarcely finished speaking when Mrs. Conisbrough came into the room. Judith could not but agree with her sister's words. Their mother looked haggard, worn, and aged, and all these things had greatly increased upon her since Judith had last seen her.

Judith advanced, and greeted her with tender affection; but Mrs. Conisbrough received her coldly. It was one of the girl's heaviest trials, and one which, she felt, was not likely to cease while her mother lived.

Judith had been desperate when she had

ought to stand opposite saints' days in men's and women's hearts.'

'Then I cannot be worthy of it,' said she, moved.

'And I say you are; and I say that if you will not take it, I know not where to put my hand on any other woman qualified as you are qualified for it.'

'If I took it, I should have to make up my mind that it should be for the rest of my life?'

'You would.'

A long pause. He did not interrupt her, nor press her for an answer, for, precious as the time of both was, these moments of reflection and turning-over were absolutely necessary. He leaned against the mantelpiece in silence, and she stood by the window, equally silent, seeing, without heeding them, all the throng of men and vehicles which streamed incessantly up and down the noisy thoroughfare.

What visions did she tear to shreds, he

wondered, as he watched her without letting her see his observation—what hopes did she finally immolate? what bright illusions of girlhood did she lock out from her heart for ever? Could he have known, he would have been aware that she had never had any youth, and that she even now inwardly expostulated with her destiny, which had led her up through five-and-twenty years of life without that youth. Though he and she had grown fast friends, though she and his wife had become almost like sisters, no word had ever passed her lips which could give any clue to the story of sorrow and hopelessness which had driven her forth from her home at twenty-two, a sad, unhopeful woman, and had first led her to them. That there was a story, he was persuaded; persuaded, too, that she went over it in her mind as she stood looking out of the window then, before she answered him—some story connected with her home in that green dale which he had never seen, but of which she had once or twice spoken, in

words which, though simple, had been full of life and fire.

At last her answer came :

'I will do as you wish, Dr. Wentworth. I will go to Ridgeford.'

In the joy and relief of his heart, he stepped forward and shook both her hands.

'I do thank you—from my heart I thank you. With you at its head, Ridgeford shall be the first place of its kind in England—that I swear!'

He laughed with satisfaction. Judith only looked very grave, and then he said :

'But have you no curiosity to know what my great and special reason was for wishing you to go?'

'What was it?'

'Just this. I don't want you to be lost to suffering humanity and the medical profession, whether as a member of it, or a servant of it. Once safe in that post, you are safe for life; but, until you are installed there, I have a consuming dread, which haunts me like a

ghost, of your breaking away from us, and getting married.'

'You certainly need not fear that,' said Judith, after a moment's pause, as she looked at him. 'It is the one contingency in my life which I am absolutely certain will never occur. Therefore be reassured.'

'To think of you married,' pursued the fanatic, 'devoted to one miserable man and his tiresome family, is to think of something monstrous. Well, good-bye. You'll see my wife to-morrow, before setting off. And stay at home a month, while you have the chance.'

He wrung her hand again, and departed.



think Dr. Wentworth hit upon the right person when he chose you for it.'

'He would not allow me to decline, or to urge any objections,' said Judith, turning to Delphine, almost choked with grief at the manner in which her news was received. Was it not the turning-point of her whole life? Did not her mother know well its full significance? And had she nothing warmer, nothing more sympathetic to say to it than this? 'I have had great difficulty in believing that I ought to accept it,' Judith went on, 'but at last I felt that I must at least try, and I accepted.'

She turned to her mother again, and said:

'The salary is a good one, mother; it is three hundred a year.'

'Dear me! That is certainly an improvement. The walk in life which you have chosen is not one which would have recommended itself to me; but, since you *have* chosen it, I congratulate you on being successful in it.'

Judith said no more. She had communicated the news somewhat as one does a disagreeable duty, but she had not expected it to be received thus. When Mrs. Conisbrough retired, which she did early, Delphine went with her to her room, and thus Judith and Rhoda were left alone.

'Why didn't you tell me about mamma?' said the former. 'She ought to have a first-rate physician to see her, even if we had to send to London for him. I am perfectly certain she is very seriously out of health. You should not have kept me in the dark, Rhoda.'

'It was Delphine, Judith. She said you had care and trouble enough, without having that added to them. Poor Del! She has been longing for you to come. She has had a dismal time of it with mamma.'

'Why, has mamma been cross?'

'Dreadful! She can't help it, poor thing. I can often see that it is not because she feels unkind or spiteful, but because she is miser-

able. Uncle Aglionby has a great deal to answer for, and I hope he *will* have to answer for it. I don't despair of *seeing* him brought to account sometime. Meantime it is not very agreeable for us here below. I don't know how Delphine bears it as she does, but mamma has never let her alone about having refused Mr. Danesdale.'

'Rhoda!'

'You cannot imagine what I have felt sometimes, when I have had to watch Delphine being literally tortured. Of course I don't pretend to understand the facts of the case, or why Delphine refused Mr. Danesdale, but I do know that she adores him, and that her heart is breaking.'

'Oh, Rhoda, it is what I have feared, and what has haunted me again and again, while I have been away. She is one of those who never complain, and *never* get over a thing of that kind. Poor child! But it must not go on. Does she ever see Mr. Danesdale?'

'Oh, at church, sometimes. She never

looks at him, but I have seen him look at her, with a look I cannot understand. I don't think she has ever spoken to him since that ball you went to. Sir Gabriel has not been well, and they say he is very anxious for Mr. Danesdale to be married, and that he will be soon.'

'Ah! To whom? Do they say that too?'

'Some people talk about Miss Bird. They say she has refused no end of men for his sake.'

'I don't believe it. She is a sweet little thing, but I don't believe she cares, or ever did care, a straw for Randulf Danesdale. No; depend upon it, if he marries, to oblige his father, it will be a different sort of woman—one who will put as little heart into the affair as he will himself. *Poor* fellow!'

'I know nothing about that. I know they say he is going to be married, and if he does marry I believe it will kill Delphine. She says he is quite right—she told mamma so. She says he must marry, but it will kill her all the same.'

Judith sat silent, her heart wrung; and Rhoda, who was, for her, exceedingly subdued, did not enlarge upon the situation. Presently Delphine came downstairs, looking, as Judith's eyes, sharpened by pity and fear, observed, almost transparent in her fragility.

The girls talked about their mother, and Judith found her sisters as anxious as herself to have advice. She said she should write to Dr. Wentworth, and ask his advice, and request him to tell them whom they ought to consult.

Later, when Judith and Rhoda again happened to be alone, the latter said:

'Mr. Danesdale has been abroad for ever so long with Mr. Aglionby.'

'Has he?'

'Yes; they are most tremendous friends. People call them Orestes and Pylades. Whenever Mr. Aglionby is at home, Mr. Danesdale is with him, or he is with Mr. Danesdale. But our cousin doesn't spend much of his time at Scar Foot. He's there just now

though, and nobody says anything about his getting married. His aunt lives with him and keeps house for him, and some people seem to like him. The Mallesons do. I've seen him there once or twice, and he is fearfully grave and dignified. I can't hate the man, though I should like to.'

Judith was saved from the necessity of a reply, by the entrance of Delphine. She pondered upon all she had heard, and in her mind the situation resolved itself into this, that her mother would not live long. Her eye, now practised in reading the signs of most kinds of disease, beheld the beginning of the end, written very plainly in Mrs. Conisbrough's appearance and expression. With her would die her secret and all chance of its becoming known; and for them, in their youth and loneliness, would remain nothing in the world but to work out, as best they could, the sad behest:

'Work, be unhappy, but bear life, my son.'

For herself she could answer. She felt within her strength to meet her fate and master it. She thought she could answer for Rhoda too. No doubt the struggles would be desperate, the torture keen, before conquest was hers, but it would be hers in the end, she felt sure. But for her best-beloved, to whom she was powerless to give hope on the one hand, or callous indifference on the other, or, yet again, the resolve that rides triumphant over death—what remained for her? She dared not attempt to look forward or to answer the question honestly. She had resolution to face most possibilities, but not the one which carried Delphine out of her life.





CHAPTER XII.

'WAIT TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME.'

IT was a little more than a week after Judith Conisbrough's return, a sultry afternoon at the end of July. At Scar Foot all was quiet, except the rooks which wheeled and cawed noisily in the trees. The windows were all open, now that the sun had left the house, after being closed all morning, with the blinds down, to keep the said sun out. In the dining-room the luncheon-table was spread, with Aglionby and Mrs. Bryce at the head and foot of it, and Randulf, as guest, at one side.

The meal was just over, as Aglionby observed :

'You look tired, aunt. Is it the heat?'

'I suppose so. I think it is going to thunder. I generally know by my nerves when it is, and they prognosticate a storm now.'

'Just like Philippa,' said Randulf, with the air of one who has made an interesting discovery. 'She says she always knows when there's going to be a thunderstorm.'

'You don't look too brilliant yourself, Bernard,' observed Mrs. Bryce, laughing. 'Does he, Mr. Danesdale?'

'N—no. A bit thundery (like the weather), as usual, when he doesn't get enough of his own way. I should take no notice of him: he'll come round.'

'Who would not, after hearing such soothing comments passed upon his looks and the causes of them?' said Aglionby, who had been looking, as a matter of fact, pale, but darkly handsome, as usual, but across whose gravity there now flashed a smile, transforming his whole face. He pushed his chair

away as he spoke, and opened the door for Mrs. Bryce, saying:

'I really would go and rest, aunt, if I were you; or you'll be having one of your headaches.'

'I think I shall,' said Mrs. Bryce, going away.

'Where shall we go?' said Aglionby to his friend, 'for I'm at your disposal this afternoon.'

'Wherever it's coolest, and wherever it takes least exertion to get to,' was the characteristic reply.

'That's my den, then, across the houseplace,' said Bernard, leading the way.

Randulf flung himself at full-length on a settee, and began, with the usual promptitude of action which contrasted so oddly with his drawling speech:

'Can you guess what it is I want to have over with you?'

'I suppose you are really thinking of getting married?'

'Yes, more's the bad luck, I am. I want you to give me some advice as to a suitable lady.'

'Me—surely you know best yourself.'

'Not I! My father is anything but well, you know, so he wasn't sorry for the excuse to leave town, and I don't think Philippa minded much. She has got a fancy that he is really failing, and I can see that he is just miserable till I decide upon something. He has sacrificed an awful lot for me; it is right that I should sacrifice something for him, so I told him I was willing to oblige him.'

'You told me at the time' (they both seemed to know what this rather vague expression meant) 'that he had told you to wait five years if you liked, but that you should do nothing of the sort.'

'Ah! I fancied my powers of getting over troubles were greater than they turn out to be. To make a clean breast of it, I care for that girl as much to-day as I did the day she

refused me—ay, and ten times more. I never shall care for another girl. My father says I talk cynically. Philippa, poor lass! turns her eyes towards heaven, and says she wonders how I *can*'—he laughed. 'She knows nothing about it. I am going to do it, but I'll never utter one word of pretence in the whole matter; I won't have "love" so much as mentioned. Therefore, my dear fellow, think of money, beauty, rank, cleverness, discretion, dignity, suitability, as much as you please; but for God's sake don't ask me to marry any girl whom I should have to pretend to care for, or who would pretend to care for me.'

'You talk as if I could lay my finger on the proper person at a moment's notice.'

'So you can, if you choose.'

'It's plain to see, from that, that you know perfectly well who is to be the victim of your despair, or the accomplice of your heartless project—whichever you like to call it. You mean Miss Askam, I suppose?'

'Well, she is well known to be the most

heartless, ambitious, worldly, self-seeking little monkey in the North Riding.'

'So I believe.'

'I thought of her instantly. But I had a scruple.'

'What was that?'

'Some one told me that you admired her.'

'I? Good Lord! Set your mind at rest, I beg; and if my services can be of the least help to you in the matter, command them. But I would like to give you a word of advice.'

'Well?'

'You would do better to look for some one else. I know that Dorothy Askam appears to be exactly what you have said. I don't believe she knows she has got a heart, but I also believe that if you made love to her, she would find it out, and that very soon.'

'Then she won't do. I must have some one to whom I shall not have to pretend even to make love. Make love!' he added,

bitterly. 'Make *love!* after seeing *her* last Sunday, and her drooping looks! I know this—I must not see her again if I can help before it's all over, or I shall funk it at the very last. It's hideous—hideous! I've often heard of girls selling themselves, and seen them do it, too, with smiling faces, and take any amount of spooning from fellows whom they may almost loathe; but I never knew what it must feel like till now.'

'Poor innocent victim! Poor unsheltered lamb!' was the soothing reply.

'Ah, your sympathy was always of the robust kind,' grumbled Randulf. 'A stroke on the back with one hand, and a cut of the whip from the other.'

'If you drop the whip for long in commiserating either your friend's grief or your own, you find yourself wreathed with weeping willow before long, and blown out with sentimental sighs,' retorted Aglionby.

'Well, will you think it over, and let me have the result of your meditations?'

'I will.'

'Do you ever hear anything of Miss Vane "that was," as they say, now?'

'I have seen her more than once since her marriage, and her husband says that sometimes she tells him what prospects she gave up for his sake. I go over and see them when I want to be reminded that once upon a time I was made a great fool of, all the time that I thought myself a person of the greatest penetration.'

A pause ensued, which was broken by the entrance of a servant with a note for Aglionby.

'The messenger is waiting for an answer, sir.'

He read it through—it was very short—got up, and, without making the slightest observation, scribbled off an answer as short as the note, gave it to the servant, and said:

'Tell William I want Egyptian—he must saddle him at once.'

'Are you mad?' murmured Randulf. 'To ride—on an afternoon like this.'

'It's a summons,' said Aglionby, 'which may mean a great deal, or perhaps nothing at all. Hark to me, Randulf. Establish yourself here for the night. I can't tell when I may return, but it will be sometime to-night, and I may have news for you.'

'News—about what?'

'Don't press me! It is but a chance. But stay—to oblige me, old fellow. And, for Heaven's sake, don't write and propose to Miss Askam, or Miss Anyone, while I am out.'

Randulf shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, to please you. And what am I to say to Mrs. Bryce?'

'That I was called off on business, and will be back to-night.'

When Egyptian was announced as being ready, Randulf Danesdale, despite the heat, followed his friend into the yard, and stood bareheaded while he mounted, followed him to the gate, and leaned upon it long, watching

while Aglionby rode out in the blazing sun, along the road to Yoresett.

'Perhaps the riddle is going to be solved at last,' he said to himself, as he returned to the house.





CHAPTER XIII.

CONFESSION, OR EXPLANATION ?

AGLIONBY rode swiftly under the scorching sun, along the high, wild road to Yoresett. He went up the village street, and dismounted at the inn, where it was customary for the visitors of all degrees to leave their horses while they transacted their business in the town, and then he walked down the street again to Yoresett House, pulled the bell, and asked to see Mrs. Conisbrough.

The servant seemed to understand that he was expected, for she said 'Yes, sir,' with some alacrity, and admitted him at once,

ushering him into the parlour at the left hand of the hall—the one room of that house which he had ever been in. The light in it was somewhat dim after the blaze of sunshine outside, for the blinds were half-down, and Bernard, as he entered and looked around him, appeared very tall and pale, and rather gaunt, as he had grown to look of late. He had deluded himself lately into the idea that he was 'getting over' his disappointment about Judith, and that he was becoming reconciled to the position to which she had relegated him ; but he was mistaken, as this afternoon and its occurrences had made him feel. The mere knowledge that Judith was at home, that he might meet and see her, had excited him ; he could have echoed, with regard to her, all that Randulf had said about Delphine. Then Mrs. Conisbrough's note coming had made the emotion deeper, and, as it were, given a significance to their conversation.

He found Mrs. Conisbrough alone, and he

was shocked to see what an invalid, what a wreck she had become. She leaned back in her chair, with a white fleecy shawl round her shoulders, and close beside a small fire, even on this fiery July afternoon. Her cheeks were wasted; her eyes were hollow. He had not Judith's practical experience to go upon, but he instinctively felt that he was in the presence of one whose feet were hastening to her grave; whose spirit must soon say farewell to this life; to its griefs and joys, and hopes and fears. She looked at him long and steadily, and in silence. There was an expression upon her face which he did not quite understand—a look of coldness, of something like defiance. He laid down his hat, bent over her, and said:

'You sent for me, Mrs. Conisbrough.'

'Yes. I happen to be quite alone to-day, and as I felt a little stronger and wished to speak to you, I sent for you. I hope I have not inconvenienced you.'

'Your summons would have been obeyed

at whatever inconvenience, but, as it happens, it caused me none at all.'

'Pray be seated, Mr. Aglionby. We have not seen much of you since my uncle's death. It is long since I even saw you. I have been a great invalid of late, and have not left my house for many months.'

'I heard you had been in ill-health, and was sorry to learn it. I hope there is no cause for any real uneasiness.'

'Not uneasiness,' she replied, with a peculiar smile, which chilled him, he knew not why. 'Oh no! I have nothing—it is long since I had anything left to be uneasy about. My daughters were uneasy, and last Sunday Judith's great friend Dr. Wentworth of Irkford came to see me.'

'Yes.'

'They did not tell me that he had come just for that; and they imagine that I did not know it. He professed to be staying at the Mallesons', and to have called casually to see Judith on some business; and then he

pretended to think me looking ill, and offered to examine my heart. They think I did not guess it all, and I have not undeceived them. He tired me dreadfully with his stethoscopes and instruments and poking about. I had no breath left in me when he had done. Such things are very trying in a heart-complaint.'

'They must be, indeed,' he said gravely. 'I hope——'

'Oh, he told them what I could have told him without all that fuss—that I have not long to live. I have known that for some time now, but they don't tell me, for fear of upsetting me.'

'It is a most natural feeling. And perhaps, after all——'

'Oh no!' She smiled in the same chill and weary manner. 'My days are numbered. I am going to die. Death has come to my bedside day and night, as I lay awake, and has taken my hand, and said to me, "Very soon I shall come and bid you arise, and

then you will have to get up and follow me, willing or unwilling." As it happens, I am willing—very willing. And knowing that—I have sent for you.'

Aglionby was dumb; and made no answer to her. She spoke with perfect calmness, but he realised the entire and unvarnished truth of all she said. There is no mistaking the mien of those who have, as she had, held daily communion with Death, and got to look upon him as a friend; to wait for his final coming with eagerness, and who have but one thing to reproach him with—that of not fulfilling his warnings with greater promptitude.

'I have something to say to you,' she went on presently. 'For a wonder the girls are all out. They are spending a long day with the Mallesons at Kumer in Swaledale. Mr. Malleson is taking the clergyman's duty there.'

'Yes, I have been to see them once or twice since they went.'

'They will not be back till quite late, as Mr. Malleson is going to drive them over. So I was free to carry out my purpose. I want to explain to you how it was that your grandfather left all his money to you instead of to me and my girls. You must have wondered about it many times, have you not?'

'Naturally. And perhaps you on your part have thought me grasping and hard, to——'

'No. I did once think so, and expressed an opinion of the kind, but Judith explained. She told me it was not your fault, but hers. She would not allow you to act differently.'

'She would not allow me to speak to you, and I obeyed her.'

'Yes, I know. It is the fashion now to make all your confidences to strangers, and to obey anyone rather than your parents. And yet, had you come to me, *I* could have explained it all, as no one else can. In order

to make you understand, I shall have to go back a long way, but I will be as quick as I can about it. I was left an orphan very early, and almost penniless too. I was brought up by my uncle at Scar Foot, with my cousin Ralph, your father. If my uncle had had a daughter, he would have expected blind obedience from her; so you may imagine what he exacted from me, a niece, and his dependent. He did not mean to be unkind, but no power on earth would ever have convinced him that he did not know people's wants, and wishes too, far better than they did themselves.

'As a rule I managed to get on with him, but I was an Aglionby as well as he—his sister's child—and I had some of the Aglionby spirit in me. There were times when I revolted in secret, but I was afraid of him—I always have been afraid of brute force; what they call the superiority of sex.

'Sometimes I succeeded in gaining my own ends in opposition to his, but if I did it

was by means of subterfuge. I am not going to apologise for that, and I do not feel in the least ashamed of it. I read the other day that that "superiority of sex" argument must always be unanswerable in the hands of a coalheaver. Quite true; and the man who chooses to treat a woman to arguments of the coalheaver kind, transformed from the physical to the moral side, that man deserves to be cheated, and he may expect to be cheated. I cheated my uncle many a time, in order to obtain things which a generous-minded man would never have needed asking for. I am glad that I did it,' she added slowly, and with cold and concentrated bitterness, while Aglionby sat silent, astounded, and almost aghast at the psychological problem that was gradually being laid bare to him. 'I just explain this to you to show that with me to deceive him when he oppressed me beyond bounds with his tyranny, had grown into a habit, which I first excused to myself, then justified, and

presently realised that it required no justification—it was right. I cheated him as a matter of course, when I should have behaved with transparent honesty to anyone else.

'Ralph was better able to get his own way openly, but he had recourse to subterfuge many and many a time. Often and often have we combined to circumvent the plans of his father, when they were odious to us. We were very good friends, Ralph and I—brother and sister, you understand; but I cared more for him than he did for me, till the wretched day came on which my uncle took it into his head that we should be married.

'"No sooner said than done," was his motto. He told Ralph privately what he desired, and bade him propose to me. Ralph did not want me, and said so openly—which I did not know till later. It was the first time he had boldly opposed his father, and when he saw the storm of wrath that ensued, he said, by way of excuse, that

he was sure I did not wish it either, and that I would not have him if he asked me.

'Now, mark, when he wanted his own way, my uncle could flatter and dissimulate. It was not that he had thought we cared for each other, or that we had struck him as being exceedingly well suited to one another. He wished it, and it should be. He came to me, and said he had reason to think Ralph cared for me—would I marry him if he wished it? And then he painted the future—how he would provide for us, how one day Scar Foot was to be ours, and so on.

'Ralph was agreeable to me; I was tired to death of being treated as a child without will, or an idiot without reason. I foresaw freedom and independence, and an indulgent young husband, instead of a tyrannical old uncle. I said yes, I would consent. This news was communicated to Ralph, who, for all answer, said that he had given way in many things, but that, as to choosing a wife, he could do that for himself, and that he was

not going to marry a woman whom he looked upon as his sister, especially when she did not care two straws for him, nor he for her.

'That answer touched my vanity. I never forgave Ralph for saying it. I was furious at having seemed willing to marry him, even though I had been told he wished me to do so, and I hated my uncle, for having put me into such a position, with a hatred I cannot describe. To gratify his own imbecile self-will, and love of power, I was to be made cheap—to profess myself willing to be forced in marriage upon a man who would not have me.

'Still my uncle would not give up his scheme. He threw us together; his favourite plan was to send us out for walks in the summer evenings. I remember it well—we used to go, one on one side of the lane, and the other on the other; he used to switch off the tops of the flowers and weeds with his cane, and I used to pout, and pluck the grasses, and pull the seeds off, saying, "This

year, next year—sometime, never." That was to see when I should be married—not to Ralph.

'We became the talk of the neighbourhood, of course. People laughed at us. My uncle raged; my cousin was sullenly obstinate, as weak characters are, when they get a fixed idea into their heads. I was miserable and furious, and we were all three unspeakably ridiculous.

'At last an opportunity came, which even my uncle hailed with delight, of sending Ralph away for a few months.

'There was some business in London to be attended to. All would have been well if Ralph had been allowed to go in peace; but his father, with his usual insane spirit of self-assertion, told him, threateningly, that he expected him to come to his senses while he was away, and to return home prepared to obey. It was just a threat—bravado, meant to show that he was the master, which he was not, with all his blustering. Ralph chose to

take it in earnest. In London he met Bernarda Long, and the next thing we knew was, that he had married her. He simply sent the news to his father, leaving him to receive it as he chose. I conjecture that your mother's high and resolute character had for the moment inspired him, and rendered him regardless of consequences. He suffered for marrying her, but I think he did well to marry her, and I do not believe he ever really repented having done so.

'I need not go into the details of my uncle's rage when he heard the news. You have heard about it; how he vowed to disinherit Ralph, and said he would never own him. He took possession of me in a savage kind of way—not because he really loved me much, or desired to benefit me, but to make me the instrument of his revenge on Ralph. He made my life a burden to me. Men are brutes—that is all I know about them. *I* had to bear the brunt of his displeasure; I had to listen to all his useless railings and

ragings. I hated the Aglionbys, father and son, and nothing will ever make me see that I had done anything to deserve my lot at that time. Two selfish, headstrong men, who, when they could not subdue one another, poured the vials of their wrath upon a poor woman over whom they had fallen out, and who would have asked nothing better than never to see them or hear of them again.

'My uncle made a will in my favour, and told me he had done so, and never lost any opportunity of impressing upon me that he had done it out of no superfluous goodwill to me, but out of hatred to Ralph. That was soothing to my feelings, as you may suppose. I got to look forward to his death, and to the distant future, as to the time of my release and my salvation, and to the possession of the money as my just indemnification for what I had gone through; and I see it still in that light.

'I did not marry immediately after Ralph, I lived at Scar Foot for two long years after

that, and went through trouble and humiliation enough, I can tell you. It hardened me. Two years after Ralph's marriage I married Mr. Conisbrough, who was the incumbent of this place, which you know is in the parish of Stanniforth. When you were six years old, your father died. My first child died an infant. Judith, when Ralph died, was a little infant. When the news of your father's death came, it struck my uncle to the ground; but he was not tamed even then. He knew, though, that he had done wrong—he had always known it. The news of his son's death came like a revelation to him, I suppose. He thought about it, and remembered you. He imagined that if he could get you into his hands he could mould you to his will, and then, after all, an Aglionby, flesh of his flesh, and all that, would have Scar Foot. No sooner planned than he set about executing his scheme. *I* was nothing; I was a woman. I had been his dependent; he had always felt that he might dispose of me much

as if I had been a bale of goods. He had made a will in my favour and in favour of my children; but what did that matter? A will can always be altered while a man is in his right mind, and while he is able to hold a pen and sign his name. His will should be altered. And with the delicate consideration which had always distinguished his treatment of me, *I* was the fortunate person whom he selected to be the instrument of his purpose. I had the honour of being ordered to go to Irkford, where Ralph had settled, and where your mother and you were then living. He would have gone himself, but he hated your mother so that he would hold no personal interview with her, and it never occurred to him that Marion could resent; that Marion could question his will: she would go and invite another woman to practically step into her place; she would go and use every effort to secure to the child of the man who had scorned her—for Ralph did scorn me—all the advantages which had been promised to her,

and which had been earned hardly enough, in all conscience, if they had been ten times as great.

'What a fool he was! What a great, selfish, blundering fool! Men *are* fools. The great mystery to me is how they, with their consummate stupidity, have yet managed to gain the mastery over us. Brute force again, I suppose, is the only answer to the question. I went to Irkford. I had to take my nurse and baby with me, of course. My commission was to tell your mother that your grandfather was wishful to provide for you as if nothing had ever happened, and, finally, to leave you his estate and property, as he would have done in the natural course of things. The conditions attached to this proposal were, that you were to live with your grandfather eleven months in the year, and one with your mother, and that no direct communication was to pass between your mother and your grandfather. On these conditions she also was to be suitably provided for, and was to

be free as air to follow her own course in the future ; even to marry again, if she chose to do so.

'You perceive that this proposal was susceptible of being made either openly insulting, or, at any rate, fair and politic, just according to the way in which the messenger delivered it. I was in no mood to make it smooth, or to deliver it pleasantly. When I saw your mother, also, I am bound to say that she received me with a coldness and a haughtiness which were by no means conciliating. Smarting under my wrongs and insults, and indignant at her reception of me, I felt a savage pleasure in delivering the message as rudely and abruptly as possible. I did not for a moment suppose she would refuse my overtures. I told her that Mr. Aglionby, of Scar Foot, wished to have the guardianship of his grandchild, and that he was willing to provide for him on condition that the mother contented herself with seeing him one month in each year, and that she never, under any

pretext, sought a personal interview with Mr. Aglionby, or wrote a direct letter to him. All this I told her as if it were a matter of the profoundest indifference to me what course she took, or what became of her and the child.

'You will please understand that I was faithful to the letter of my instructions. I said exactly what my uncle had said, but I said it in a certain way. The effect of it surprised me. Your mother rose up and almost ordered me from her house.

'"Tell him," she said, "that I would rather beg my bread and my child's bread through the streets, than hand him into the power of a man who can behave as he has done. He ruined his own son; he shall not ruin mine; nor shall he insult me with impunity. And you," she added, "how could you, a woman, a mother with a baby at her breast, come and offer such terms to another mother, one who is widowed; one who has *nothing* but her child to make

this life worth a moment's purchase to her?"

'I shrugged my shoulders—how was it likely that she could understand? I took her answer: I came away; I left Irkford. I was not sorry that she had answered me as she had done: it would be a blow to my uncle; it would humble his pride. They would both have to humble themselves—the proud man and the proud woman too, if they were ever to come to anything like an understanding. I had been staying at Scar Foot, when I had been sent to Irkford. I returned straight there.

'Your mother had said to me, that she was not so utterly destitute as I seemed to imagine; that she yet possessed a relation or two who, even if she died, would not let her child starve. I told this to your grandfather: I said her relations would provide for you rather than that you should get into his hands, and I was happy in saying it.'

(Here Mrs. Conisbrough related the scene

which had taken place on her return to Scar Foot, and her narrative agreed in every particular with that given by old Martha to Judith, except that she omitted to mention her own excessive agitation at the time.)

'At times, after that,' she went on, 'I used to amuse myself by thinking that I, if I chose, could bring about a reconciliation—I alone. But I am not so sure now that I should have been able to do so, had I tried. Then my own troubles began, and I gave over thinking of you and your mother.

'Soon after Rhoda's birth, my husband died, and with him, of course, the greater part of my means of subsistence. I was more in the power of my uncle than ever, and that fact hardened me as nothing else could have done. Sordid, grinding poverty oppressed me; forced self-interest ruthlessly to the front, and induced me to keep silence.

'All went well—what I called well—for twenty-two years. Just fancy what a length of time in which to live as I did! But you

cannot understand it—men never can understand women's lives and women's trials—it would be as absurd to ask the sea to understand a stagnant pond. Then my uncle went to Irkford, three years ago—simply on a matter of amusement—to attend a political meeting in a town he had once known, and took my daughter Judith with him, "for a change," he said. She had always been his favourite—so far as he had a favourite.

'The day after his return, he came here, and told me that he had seen you, and how deceived he must have been about those relations of your mother's. I knew that my day was over. I do not say I knew I was found out—for I do not see that there was anything to be found out. I had told no lies; I had kept to the letter of my message. But my day was over, of course. It was my ill-luck. I have been an unlucky woman all my life. He sent for Mr. Whaley that night, and made the will which left everything to you. As to the rest, you know it all.'

She stopped.

Aglionby, his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands, was intently staring at her, honestly but vainly endeavouring to put himself in her place. He did not speak, and by-and-by she went on:

'Different reasons make me wish to tell you this. Not that I am afraid of anything that you can do to me. Do not suppose it for a moment! Partly, I wish you to understand that it was not out of any sudden affection for you that your grandfather altered his will—it was because I had been too true to him, and he wished to be revenged upon me. He was true to his character to the last: "the ruling passion strong in death" was exemplified in him, if ever it was in anyone.

'When you leaned over the table that day at Scar Foot, and looked at me, you were so strangely like your mother, and your father, and even your grandfather, that I was frightened: it was as if I had seen three ghosts at

once—spectres that I hated, all of them. I could not bear it.

'Next, there is one person who in life believed in me, and was good to me—good as a kind angel. If he had stayed with me, I should have been a better woman: I should have confessed my wrong, and he would have forgiven me. It is he alone whom I am afraid to meet. That one is my husband.

'I fear neither my uncle, nor my cousin, nor my cousin's wife. They made me what I was. But I fear lest my husband should turn away from me. You must know that he was the purest and best and gentlest man that ever lived—he was like Delphine, only a man. I am in hopes that his spirit hears me now, and that when I die it is he who will be sent to lead me into the next life—whatever that may be. Therefore, because I feel that he would approve of it, I say, will you forgive me? I shall soon be out of the way. Perhaps that may make it easier to you.'

'But your daughters—do you not see that it is they whom you have injured irreparably?' he said, almost breathlessly.

'My daughters,' said Mrs. Conisbrough, her face hardening, 'have behaved unnaturally. They condemned me unheard—at least Judith did; and Delphine believes in Judith as if she were God—so she condemns me too. They do not know what you know now, yet they condemned me. That is all I have to say about them. I was born to be wretched, and most faithfully has my destiny been carried out.'

Aglionby started up, and began to pace about the room, distracted how to answer her. He wanted, with the instinct of a reasoning animal, to account for her conduct; to assign some central motive—some ruling idea as the origin and motive-power of her actions during her life. He could find none. He had yet to learn that Mrs. Conisbrough, like many another woman and man who sins, sinned very greatly in consequence of having

no ruling motive in her life. That 'commanding voice, which it is our truest life to hear and to obey,' had been absent with her; as it is with millions of her fellow-creatures, Christians and sceptics alike.

Ruling motives are not so common as the romance-writer in general would have us believe. It would be much easier correctly to portray human nature, and what the author of 'Caleb Williams' calls, 'things as they are,' if they were. A man or woman with a ruling motive, a supreme passion regulating all his actions, is a fine conception. Provide the ruling motive: let it be good or bad, according as the romance-writer feels well and cheerful, or bilious and gloomy; only make quite sure that all else is well-subordinated to it, and hey, presto! your character is bare before you, as plain to read as the roads and mountains in an ordnance map, and you have nothing to do but take a clean sheet of paper, and a new pen, so that your flow of language be not interrupted by

scratches and splutterings, and write it down. A pleasing idea, for lessening the toils of the scribbler, but unfortunately one which is simply useless to the artist: since chaos, oftener than order, rules the majority of commonplace lives, anarchy, not law, is God. A high emotion here, a low one there, predominates; now the soul draws us upwards; now the senses drag us downwards—it is one long game of pull devil, pull baker, between the higher and the lower nature: sometimes the one has it, sometimes the other; seldom does either hold undisputed sway for long. The 'ruling idea' retires discreetly into the background, and places itself modestly upon the golden throne which many generations of enthusiastic but deluded story-tellers have combined to erect for it. The 'ruling motive' is, so far as the millions are concerned, a beautiful figment of the imagination: perhaps, in the case of some scores, or more probably tens, it may become a reality, to be embraced and obeyed.

Aglionby, with the ingenuousness of youth, for he was young, and he was ingenuous, as surely all his actions heretofore must have proved—Aglionby, then, had a vague, youthful belief in the 'ruling motive' hypothesis. The flat contradiction given by Mrs. Conisbrough to his preconceived notions staggered him. We often are staggered when we are confronted in others by the results of principles of which we are ourselves living illustrations.

'Well,' she suddenly broke in upon him, 'you have come off the victor, as I might have known you would, you being a man, and I a woman. It is always the way. Since you have conquered, surely you can manage to forgive.'

He stopped abruptly before her.

'No, I cannot,' he said, curtly. 'At least, not yet. I must first know something which *you* cannot tell me, however much you desired to do so. You must excuse me a short time. I have heard you; you seem only able to see

things from one point of view; but you must allow me to see them from one or two others. I trust I may be able to extend my hand to you this very night, and say, "Let us forgive and forget." I hope so. But there *is* a contingency—if it occurs, I cannot—no, by heaven, I cannot and will not forgive you!'

The answer was not what she had expected. The idea that perhaps this forgiveness which she had, as it were, rather demanded than begged, might be refused after all, startled and alarmed her.

'Oh, you must, you must,' she exclaimed, in agitation. 'You must not let me die unforgiven. If I did wrong for it, see how I have suffered—every day, every hour of my life has been a privation, a disappointment, a mortification.'

'That may be,' he said coldly. 'But until I am satisfied on one point, I cannot promise forgiveness. I am human—I am flesh and blood, and not made of wood, or cast-iron. I never even pretended to think any

man ought to offer his right cheek to him that has smitten his left. You shall know to-night—before the sun sets, I hope. There are others whom you have wronged even more than you have wronged me; and it is to them I must first appeal. But you shall know before to-day is out.'

He picked up his hat, walked out of the room, and left her.





CHAPTER XIV.

ON YORESETT MOOR.

JUDITH had gone unwillingly with her sisters to the Mallesons' temporary home in Swaledale. They had driven there. It was only some four miles distant from Yoresett, but the road was a mountain-pass, going first sheer up, and then sheer down a steep hill, with glorious views of moor and mountain on every side. The Mallesons made much of the girls, and were heartily delighted to see them. Delphine and Rhoda were pleased and touched by this kindness; so, too, was Judith, but she could not shake off the weight which op-

pressed her spirits. The cause of her unhappiness was not far to seek. It was the wretched breach between herself and her mother which took the pleasure from her life at this time. That breach had only grown deeper during the week she had been at home, certainly not from any wish of Judith's. But all her submissiveness, all her eager wish to please, only seemed to irritate Mrs. Conisbrough further and further against her daughter. She had parted from her with marked coldness that morning, and the remembrance of her alien glance, and of the hard and unfriendly ring of her voice, lay like a leaden weight at Judith's heart.

All morning the sense of unhappiness had been growing, until the idea suddenly darted into her mind that her mother was alone this afternoon. What if she were to return home, and taking advantage of this solitude, were to plead for forgiveness—though for what fault she could not have told—were to assure her mother of her deep

and unchanging love for her, and beg her no longer to be so cold and severe with her?

The desire to act upon this impulse became stronger and stronger, until at last, as she and Mr. Malleson, to whom she had been talking about Dr. Wentworth, sat alone upon a garden-bench when lunch was over, and while her sisters and Mrs. Malleson were equipping the children for a donkey-ride to a well-known waterfall, where they were to have a gipsy-tea, she suddenly said:

'Mr. Malleson, will you do me a favour?'

'With pleasure, if I can.'

'Let me go home now, and if the others seem surprised, say I did not like to leave mamma alone all day, but that they are not on any account to follow me—will you?'

'But, my dear Miss Conisbrough, the heat, the long walk over the hill——'

'I am as strong as ever I was. Listen, Mr. Malleson. I have offended my mother; I want to make my peace with her. I must

have behaved wrongly in some way—been too proud, or too stiff, or something. She will forgive me, I am sure, if I beg her to do so. She is alone, and I shall have the better chance.'

'In that case, go, by all means, and take my best wishes with you. I will explain what is necessary to the others.'

'Thank you—thank you,' said she, shaking his hand, and adding, with a rather feeble smile, 'I will come to see you and Paulina again before I return to Irkford. You may depend upon me.'

With which, picking up her sunshade, she left him, and set her face towards the hill, in the direction of Danesdale. Her heart was beating with one of those sudden terrors which assail us sometimes, without much cause, perhaps, but none the less potently on that account.

Dr. Wentworth had said her mother was not likely to die at once, or even very suddenly; but, he had added, she might do

so: there was always the possibility of such a thing.

Judith wondered almost wildly why they had consented all to leave her. Who knew what might happen during their absence? It was just at such times that things—by which she meant calamities—so often did happen. And at any rate she must make an effort to put an end to this unnatural hostility between herself and her mother. If the latter were to die without having forgiven her—her heart came to her throat at the mere idea of it.

It had been nearly four when she left the Mallesons' house. The climb to the top of the ridge from Swaledale was a steep one. Then came a rough but more level road, where the moors spread around far and wide, and then the path quickly descended again into Danesdale, and being directly above the town, was known thereabouts as Yoresett Moor, or Common.

She met not a soul as she went up the hill —slowly, in spite of her heart's eagerness;

she met not a soul, and she heard scarce a sound, save the melancholy call of the curlew, or the full-throated song of a lark. The shooting season had not begun, so that not even the crack of a sportsman's gun disturbed the quietness. It was almost awfully grand and beautiful to see the sweeping wastes of purple moor—to mark one huge hill-top after another raise itself into the blue ether, each like a great incorporate hymn of praise to That which had planned them 'or ever the world began.'

Judith was not a lover of towns, and it was therefore natural to her mind to institute a comparison—to think how miserable, beside this vast and imposing stillness and calm of eternal nature, appeared the clatter and rattle and bustle of little, fussy, noisy man, with his railways and his commerce, clamouring for his rights, and cheating his fellows, inspired apparently with the ardent desire to resemble a pike as nearly as possible, and to find the rest of his race convenient gudgeons.

It all came home to Judith, whose love for *this* rather than for *that* was innate and hereditary, but it made less impression upon her than usual, because of the fever of her heart and the preoccupation of her mind.

She at last arrived almost at the top of the steep ascent. Here the view on either side was interrupted by high crags of grey limestone rock, rent and torn and tossed, while the herbage could scarce find a place amidst the chaos of huge stones and boulders which lay up and down, like the balls with which giants or demons had been playing some Titanic game. By looking back she could see down into dark Swaledale, from which she had ascended. Many hundreds of feet it lay below her, and looked like a narrow little passage enough, walled in by big black fells, some of the 'greate hilles where they dygge leade,' spoken of by the chronicler, while the 'right noble ryuer, the Swale,' forced its way boisterously through it. This prospect was to the left. To the right there was so

abrupt a turn in the road that only a few yards of it were to be seen, and then the crags of limestone shut it in. Just here was the green and mossy source of a little dancing rivulet, which came trickling out of the rock with a murmur of endless, low-voiced contentment, at having come safely from the dark womb that bore it, and being free to run into the gay sunshine and over the broad moors.

It was at this point that Judith perforce sat down to rest a few moments before taking her way down the hill to Yoresett, a descent of two full miles, which was almost more fatiguing than the ascent. The great boulders strewed about offered an abundance of resting-places. She seated herself upon one of them, fixed her eyes upon the little murmuring rill, and waited awhile. The sun had gone behind one of the crags; a fresh, delicate breeze played upon her face; she was literally enjoying the shelter of 'a great rock in a weary land.'

The rocks were so immense, and the bend in the road to the right so sharp, that she neither saw nor heard anything until she suddenly became conscious that a rider was pulling up his horse at her very side. She looked up and half rose, with a smothered cry, as she saw Bernard Aglionby.

'Ha, Judith! This is greater luck than I expected,' said he, dismounting, and without further ado throwing the bridle over a tall stone pillar which stood hard by. He came to her side, and said abruptly: 'I heard that you and your sisters were with the Mallesons to-day, and I was on my way there.'

'Indeed!'

'But it was you whom I wanted to see,' he added; and there was a strangely breathless and excited look about him which excited her also, and made her wonder, with a vague alarm, what was coming.

He seated himself beside her, but he had not asked her how she did, nor offered to shake hands with her.

'So you are at home for your holiday?'

'Yes.'

'Do they loose your chain for long? How soon have you to be back in prison?'

'I have a month's holiday.'

'Marvellous! And then, back you must go, to nurse a lot of sick men and women, whether you like it or not.'

'I am not going to nurse any more myself. I am going to be a matron, and look after the nurses,' she said, essaying a feeble jest.

'Matron!' echoed he, laughing sarcastically. 'And going back, are you? I suppose that doctor counts upon you much as we count upon sunrise following sunset?'

'He certainly expects me back.'

'You *have* been nursing sick people, though, for three years, have you not?'

'Yes, I have.'

'And you delight in it, I suppose?'

'No, I do not.'

'You are wretched in it, then?'

'Oh no! You are quite mistaken.'

'Humph! Neither happy nor miserable. That's an odd state of things. At any rate, you are glad to be at home, and you are happy there.'

'It is just there that I am not happy. If I were, I should not need to go away.'

'An admission at last! And why are you not happy at home?'

'That is my affair,' she replied, concisely.

'And mine.'

The answer followed quick as the peal of thunder on the flash of lightning. She scarcely had time to look at him, startled, when he said:

'I know why you are unhappy. Because, twenty-five years ago, your mother told a lie, or acted one, which comes to the same thing, and you have committed the crime of finding her out.'

'Ah—h!' she exclaimed, with a kind of long sigh, as if some great strain or terrible suspense had come to an end; and then, as

though remembering herself, she added quickly: 'I don't know what you mean.'

'Oh yes, you do,' replied Aglionby, smiling, and the accent of his voice belied the accusation contained in his words; he brought the impeachment against her, which he had been conning over a hundred times during his ride up the hill. 'You know well what I mean. You discovered this wrong that had been done; you found that you and yours had just escaped profiting by it. The narrowness of the escape made you hard and uncompromising. You told me that the justice I wished to do you would *scorch* you—yes, benefits from my hand were to scorch you—I have not forgotten, you see. The word scorched me, I assure you. And you found my weak points—you found you could twist and turn me to your will; so, instead of trusting me, instead of giving me one moment's credit for a grain of generosity or manly feeling, you tortured me, and banished me, and befooled me, and held me at arm's

length, and devoted yourself to a martyrdom to expiate the sin. And, above all, you were determined that I should never know it—oh, never! Hard, pitiless wretch that I was, you would never give me the chance of using the blessed privilege of forgiveness. What do you say? I do not hear you.'

His voice had sunk to a whisper as he bent nearer to her, and thought he distinguished something like:

'You did not believe in forgiveness.'

'Nor you either, it appears,' he said tenderly, though he went on with his accusations. 'You used your power over me—for you had unbounded power over me from the time you became my kinswoman and my guest—and I believe you knew it; you used that power to keep me away from your mother, who could have explained. Ah! she has a tale to tell. I was to suffer, and you were to suffer: Randulf Danesdale, and your sister—you did not mind how many of us suffered——'

'Did not *mind*—oh!'

'We were all to suffer, and I was to remain ignorant. Your plans were well laid, but they were not quite flawless: they have been frustrated, for Mrs. Conisbrough sent for me this afternoon, and told me all about it. She wished to vindicate herself, and to humble me.'

Her face had sunk into her hands, but he could see between her fingers the scarlet flame that covered it. To his last words she made no reply. She gave no sign. Was it shame, or joy, or terror, that overcame her? He bent over towards her, and said, softly:

'Judith!'

She only turned aside in silence, and he said:

'All this you have inflicted upon me, and I love you the better for it. It shows me that you thought much of me, or you would not have taken the trouble to do it. I love you the better for it, I say—and I love the pride, and the purity, and the simplicity that

dictated your course—and the high-mindedness that carried you through it all—and I shall love them the better when my love has tamed their savageness, for there is something of the savage in the way in which you have treated me—is there not? But not enough of it to repulse me *now*. Your mother asked for my forgiveness, and I, before I could give it her, had to see you.'

He took her hands gently from before her face, and looked into it, feeling as if he had never known what rejoicing was before—looked into it with eyes which claimed as his own every scorching blush, and all the anguish of fear and shame and delight which struggled there.

'You have suffered,' he said. 'It has been my fate to see your wretchedness. It is you who can forgive. What do you say?'

'Do not ask me. I—it is not I. It is you who have been wronged. It is between you and her.'

'It is between you and me,' he replied,

emphatically. 'From the time I came to Scar Foot, it has been between you and me. Think of the last three years, and tell me, if you dare, that it is not between you and me. Three such years! But I believe this is worth it, after all. If you had wanted to make the possession of you even more precious than it must in any case have been, you could not have succeeded better. It needs a man to win you—I have found that out long ago—a very man; but, you may believe me, he sits beside you, and holds your hands at this moment.'

He paused an instant, looking at her, and she gave him a glance which made his heart beat more wildly, so exquisite was it to him in its trembling mixture of pride, love, and supplication. He stooped forward, and kissed her parted lips. 'So it was for that, for *that*, that you have mistrusted me, and tortured me,' he said, with almost angry tenderness; 'oh, I hope and trust you have tortured yourself as well, you "most delicate

fiend," or all my sufferings will have gone for nothing, and I must have my revenge.'

There was triumph in his tenderness, and she tried in vain to release a hand, to hide her face, to shelter her grief and her rapture somewhere—for it was rapture she experienced at his imperious wooing, and not distrust; she knew the love of which it was the almost uncouth expression, and she knew too that he was right: the man to win her was himself, and no other.

'You cannot escape, my well-beloved cousin,' he said, 'till you have answered my question. Tell me—am I to go home with you to your mother, and thank her as well as forgive her? or am I to ride back to Scar Foot, unreconciled still? You only can decide.'

'You mean—you will do—as I wish?' she stammered.

'On one condition.'

She was silent.

'Of course you know what it is,' he went

on, with the same little smile of triumph which he could not quite repress. 'Three words—you know what they are'—he bent over her, and whispered, for the delight of whispering:

'Your mother has asked my forgiveness. She knows she has acted wrongly, though she says she has not. But I care not whether she were wrong or right. I say that if you will give yourself to me for ever, I will forgive her, fifty times over. If you will not—I never will.'

'Never?'

'No, never.'

'Then—I must,' she returned, yielding, as he saw, only inch by inch, but yielding. 'I suppose I must,' she repeated, casting a wavering glance at him, and then suddenly hiding her face upon his shoulder, 'I must, if you wish it, Bernard. You have made me wish what you wished from the first moment I knew you.'

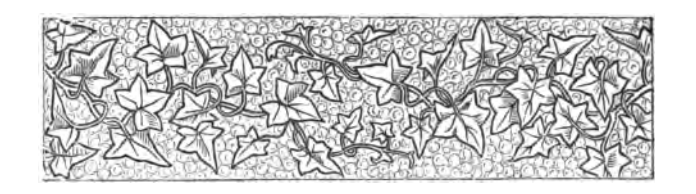
'It is well to bow to necessity,' he said, in

a voice which was not quite steady, as he folded her in his arms, with a sensation of the deepest, profoundest peace and contentment. 'And,' he whispered, with a half-laugh, 'nothing will give me greater joy than to impress that fact upon your friend Dr. Wentworth.'

She pressed his shoulder, as if expostulating, and he said:

'Don't grudge me that bit of malice. No doubt he is worth a thousand of me. I know he is. But, heaven be praised, it isn't only the first-rate men who can get good women to love them—a cross-grained carle like me, even, has his stroke of luck sometimes, and can induce a woman more or less like you to take him in hand.'

'When he has left her no choice, because of his goodness and generosity to those who have wronged him—churl that he is!' she replied; and he, looking through her eyes into her very heart, saw there—his own image.



CHAPTER XV.

GOOD-NIGHT.

'Noch eenmal lat uns spräken,
Goden Abend, gode Nacht.
Di Maand schient up de Däken,
Uns Herrgott hält de Wacht.'

RANDULF kept his promise to his friend, established himself at Scar Foot for the night, and waited for Aglionby's return. He and Mrs. Bryce dined *tête-à-tête*, and he told her that Aglionby had been called off to Yoresett on business, but was to return that night, some-time.

It gradually grew apparent that the 'some

time,' whenever it came, would be late. The evening drew on, and darkness fell, and still he had not come. Mrs. Bryce, who still felt languid from the heat, and from her recent headache, went to bed early. Randulf merely said he would have a smoke, and wait for Aglionby—the servants need not sit up; and presently all the household had retired. It grew so late, that he knew he must be the only person waking beneath that roof. He sat in the house-place beside the open door, for the night was balmy as night could be, and the moon flooded the earth with her radiance.

Randulf for the most part lay back in his easy-chair; his hands clasped behind his head, content to be silent and to dream. Once or twice he got up, and paced about the garden, and found his way down to the water's edge; looked across the motionless lake, and raised his eyes to where, at the foot of it, Addlebrough, like a grim sentinel, kept watch. It was very beautiful, but there

was also something irrepressibly weird in it, and he realised this, as he reflected upon the calm peace and homely shelter of this spot, and then recalled all the waste of wild, unearthly moors, savage fells, desolate fastnesses, which spread on every side—all full of the glamour and mystery of the summer night. A wild land: and the race that dwelt in it had something of its own sternness in their nature—especially, he thought, with a slight smile, that very family under whose roof he was sojourning this night.

As he stood, motionless, leaning on a rail, he could hear in the dead silence of the night, the murmur of rushing waters borne by the faintest breeze to his ear, from the inmost recesses of the hills in which they sprang—cascades which rush for ever, and for ever tell their tale, whether any be there to listen or no. He heard the voices of the night—those weird voices which it would be well for many of us to hear oftener—and they told an old story to him.

'Many voices spake—
The river to the lake ;
The iron-ribbèd sky was talking to the sea :
And every starry spark
Made music with the dark.

* * * * * *

'When the day had ended,
And the night descended,
I heard the sound of streamlets that I heard not in the day.
And every peak afar
Was ready for a star,
And they climbed and rolled about until the morning grey.'

'And I am ready for my star,' thought Randulf, 'if she would but arise for me.'

He did not know how long he had been there ; he was not sleepy, and he was not weary. He did not know that it was nearly half-past one in the morning, when at last, a very long way off, in the stillness he heard hoof-strokes. Not another sound interfered to hinder them from being carried to him.

Having once caught the sound of them, he

listened, lazily at first, amusing himself by speculating as to whether the rider were in good or bad humour—glad or sorry—excited or depressed. He guessed it to be Aglionby returning. No doubt the turnings and windings of the road, its ups and downs, had something to do with the fact that occasionally the sounds ceased entirely, or again died away into faintness, or seemed to be travelling in exactly the opposite direction. Be that as it may, they came irregularly; and as he listened, his mood, which had at first been simply one of idle speculation, grew into one of excitement. He threw his cigar down, stood up, and listened with a gradually-increasing anxiety, which presently grew quite breathless.

What news did this rider bring—what cheer? Sorrow or joy—laughter or tears? It was the strangest sensation he had ever had. Nearer came the hoof-strokes, and nearer: slowly, as the horse breasted the rise; quickly, as it descended the hill. Randulf at

this point made his way quickly round the house into the courtyard. A light was burning in the stables, but the men had gone to bed, as he had desired them to do.

Nearer and nearer those hoof-strokes—loud, hollow, and slowly, through the dark, shaded lane at the back of the house—then Aglionby rode into the yard, drew rein, and flung himself off his horse.

Randulf looked at him, and saw that he was very pale and very grave, but that in his eyes and about his mouth there was a look of wonderful softness, contentment, even sweetness.

'You have sat up for me, old fellow,' he said; 'you expected some news.'

'That tells me that you bring some. Is it good or bad?'

'For me it is good. I know that much. For you—that is as you and your father decide. Just let me give Egyptian a shake-down, and I will tell you all about it.'

A few moments sufficed to attend to the

horse, and then they went into the house again.

'You have been long in coming. I had no idea it was all that time,' said Randulf, casting his eyes towards the clock, as they entered the house-place.

'I have. I could not come away before. Randulf, I told you that some day those girls should find out that I was their kinsman, and should treat me as such.'

'And they have done so?'

'They have done so. It's a strange story. But I know all now, and what the blight was that hung over them—or, rather, what they chose to make into a blight. It is all gone now' . . . he paused . . . 'their mother is dead.'

'Their mother!'

Young Danesdale was thunderstruck. No suspicion that Mrs. Conisbrough had anything to do with the proceedings or the fate of her daughters had ever entered his mind.

Aglionby sat down.

'I must own that once or twice lately I have had an inkling that she was at the bottom of it,' he said. Then he told Randulf everything that had passed between him and Mrs. Conisbrough, and dwelt strongly upon the view which she herself had taken of her act. 'Nothing seemed to make her understand,' he went on, 'the significance of what she had done. She is a regular Aglionby with a weaker stock grafted on her, but she has all our hardness and bitter strength of resentment. I thank heaven for my mother; she gave me a spirit of another sort to counterbalance that one. Well, she seemed unable to comprehend that she had almost ruined her daughters' lives—and there our family spirit crops out again, Randulf—in their conduct, I mean. Who else would have looked upon such a thing as an insuperable bar to allowing themselves to be happy or to be loved, or to be married? Ridicu lous! But I love them the better for it. We are kindred spirits in that as well as in some

other things. Mrs. Conisbrough seemed mad with resentment against my grandfather; she had cherished her wrongs till she could see nothing else, poor woman! But she could not utterly blind herself. It was a secret conviction of her sin which had made her send for me, in the first instance. The truth would out, for, with all her fierceness, she was not strong—she dared not die with that burden upon her soul. She waited awhile, as if expecting me to say something. As I didn't, she had to speak. She asked me to forgive her; but it was a demand, rather than a petition. I said I must hear another verdict before I could do that. I felt I must see Judith. I was sorry for the woman, but I felt obliged to make her understand that I did not exonerate her, that I knew she had sinned. I said something, I don't remember what, and rushed off to the inn, got my horse, and set off for Swaledale. I met Judith on Yoresett Moor; she had felt uneasy about her mother, and was returning to

see how she was. I stopped, and had it out with her then and there. I told her how simple she had been, and how I loved her for it; that kind of simplicity is a refreshing thing to meet. I won my cause; in mind and body we two shall never wander far apart again. We walked back to Yoresett, and found Mrs. Conisbrough looking much as she had done when I left her; but I suppose she must have been brooding, and got more excited than appeared on the outside. At any rate, when she saw us, her face changed very much. She got up from her chair and cried out: "I *have* sinned: I have sinned against you all." She held out her hands to us, and Judith caught hold of her, crying, "But it is all forgiven, mother; he forgives you freely." I managed to make her understand that it was so, and that if she would have told me all, at the very beginning, I would have forgiven her then, and condoned it; for though I know I have this hateful hardness which belongs to my race, I

believe I had it in me, even then, to have forgiven her——'

'Of course you had. Well?'

'As I say, I managed to make her understand this, and soon afterwards she complained of a terrible pain in her side. It was getting dark, then. We laid her on the sofa; even at that moment I felt that the right I had to be with them made up for everything we had gone through, and had yet to endure. Judith sent off for the doctor, and her mother presently went off into a kind of stupor. She scarcely roused again after that. She recognised the others when they came. Malleson was with them, you know—he brought them back—and she asked to be left alone with him for a few minutes. Of course we don't know what she said. I suppose it must have been a sort of confession. It was close upon twelve when she died. She called me to her again, and looked at me and said: "So you love Judith?" I answered, "Yes;" and she said: "Ah, you

are kindred spirits. I cannot understand either of you; but your forgiveness—are you *quite sure?*" I knew what she meant, and said, "Yes, quite." It was directly after that that she died.'

They were both silent for a little time, till Aglionby said:

'As I rode home, it suddenly flashed upon me—I had had no time to realise it before—what a miracle it was that I should at last know all! Mrs. Conisbrough vacillated for ever so long before she decided to send me that note, bidding me go to her. Suppose she had decided not to do it! My last chance would have gone, for those girls would never have confessed. There is a kind of touch-and-go in the whole business which is horrible to me. I feel as if I had escaped being drowned, or tumbling over a precipice, by a hair's breadth.'

'Ay,' responded Randulf, absently.

'With me, that sin of Mrs. Conisbrough's weighs nothing—now,' Aglionby went on.

'But it was a sin, all the same. I once had a conversation with Judith, in which I maintained that there is no such thing as forgiveness of sins—and I was right in a way. I meant, that the penalty has to be borne for them by some one. I suppose I expressed myself with my usual ungracious hardness. She took it to mean that I should consider myself justified in punishing anyone who had sinned against me, and that helped to make her see this affair in a morbid light. When she is my wife, I will try to show her that there is another side to my nature. As for you and your father, being both of you what you are, I think I know which way it will go.'

'So do I,' said Randulf. 'I think that before long my father will ride over to Yoresett House again. Perhaps I shall go with him this time, and I believe we shall have a better measure of success. Poor little girl! Well might she droop, while trying to strain her gentle nature to hard thoughts and

harder deeds. As for you,' he added, looking with a smile at Aglionby, 'all I can say is, you've had a hard day of it; therefore I'll leave you, and say, *felicissima notte!*'

THE END.

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